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THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE

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THE FIRST BOOK

OF

SAMUEL.

BY THE REV. PROFESSOR

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NEW YORK

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CHAPTER I.

HANNAH'S TRIAL AND TRUST.

1 Samuel i 1—18.

THE prophet Samuel, like the book which bears his name, comes in as a connecting link between the Judges and the Kings of Israel. He belonged to a transition period. It was appointed to him to pilot the nation between two stages of its history: from a republic to a monarchy; from a condition of somewhat casual and indefinite arrangements to one of more systematic and orderly government. The great object of his life was to secure that this change should be made in the way most beneficial for the nation, and especially most beneficial for its spiritual interests. Care must be taken that while becoming like the nations in having a king, Israel shall not become like them in religion, but shall continue to stand out in hearty and unswerving allegiance to the law and covenant of their fathers' God.

Samuel was the last of the judges, and in a sense the first of the prophets. The last of the judges, but not a military judge; not ruling like Samson by physical strength, but by high spiritual qualities and prayer; not so much wrestling against flesh and blood as against principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness,

in high places. In this respect his function as judge blended with his work as prophet. Before him, the prophetic office was but a casual illumination; under him it becomes a more steady and systematic light. He was the first of a succession of prophets whom God placed side by side with the kings and priests of Israel to supply that fresh moral and spiritual force which the prevailing worldliness of the one and formalism of the other rendered so necessary for the great ends for which Israel was chosen. With some fine exceptions, the kings and priests would have allowed the seed of Abraham to drift away from the noble purpose for which God had called them; conformity to the world in spirit if not in form was the prevailing tendency; the prophets were raised up to hold the nation firmly to the covenant, to vindicate the claims of its heavenly King, to thunder judgments against idolatry and all rebellion, and pour words of comfort into the hearts of all who were faithful to their God, and who looked for redemption in Israel. Of this order of God's servants Samuel was the first. And called as he was to this office at a transition period, the importance of it was all the greater. It was a work for which no ordinary man was needed, and for which no ordinary man was found.

Very often the finger of God is seen very clearly in connection with the birth and early training of those who are to become His greatest agents. The instances of Moses, Samson, and John the Baptist, to say nothing of our blessed Lord, are familiar to us all. Very often the family from which the great man is raised up is among the obscurest and least distinguished of the country. The "certain man" who lived in some quiet cottage at Ramathaim-Zophim would never probably

have emerged from his native obscurity but for God's purpose to make a chosen vessel of his son. In the case of this family, and in the circumstances of Samuel's birth, we see a remarkable overruling of human infirmity to the purposes of the Divine will. If Peninnah had been kind to Hannah, Samuel might never have been born. It was the unbearable harshness of Peninnah that drove Hannah to the throne of grace, and brought to her wrestling faith the blessing she so eagerly pled for. What must have seemed to Hannah at the time a most painful dispensation became the occasion of a glorious rejoicing. The very element that aggravated her trial was that which led to her triumph. Like many another, Hannah found the beginning of her life intensely painful, and as a godly woman she no doubt wondered why God seemed to care for her so little. But at evening time there was light; like Job, she saw "the end of the Lord;" the mystery cleared away, and to her as to the patriarch it appeared very clearly that "the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy."

The home in which Samuel is born has some points of quiet interest about it; but these are marred by serious defects. It is a religious household, at least in the sense that the outward duties of religion are carefully attended to; but the moral tone is defective. First, there is that radical blemish—want of unity. No doubt it was tacitly permitted to a man in those days to have two wives. But where there were two wives there were two centres of interest and feeling, and discord must ensue.

Elkanah does not seem to have felt that in having two wives he could do justice to neither. And he had but little sympathy for the particular disappointment of

Hannah. He calculated that a woman's heart-hunger in one direction ought to be satisfied by copious gifts in another. And as to Peninnah, so little idea had she of the connection of true religion and high moral tone, that the occasion of the most solemn religious service of the nation was her time for pouring out her bitterest passion. Hannah is the only one of the three of whom nothing but what is favourable is recorded.

With regard to the origin of the family, it seems to have been of the tribe of Levi. If so, Elkanah would occasionally have to serve the sanctuary; but no mention is made of such service. For anything that appears, Elkanah may have spent his life in the same occupations as the great bulk of the people. The place of his residence was not many miles from Shiloh, which was at that time the national sanctuary. But the moral influence from that quarter was by no means beneficial; a decrepit high priest, unable to restrain the profligacy of his sons, whose vile character brought religion into contempt, and led men to associate gross wickedness with Divine service,—of such a state of things the influence seemed fitted rather to aggravate than to lessen the defects of Elkanah's household.

Inside Elkanah's house we see two strange arrangements of Providence, of a kind that often moves our astonishment elsewhere. First, we see a woman eminently fitted to bring up children, but having none to bring up. On the other hand, we see another woman, whose temper and ways are fitted to ruin children, entrusted with the rearing of a family. In the one case a God-fearing woman does not receive the gifts of Providence; in the other case a woman of a selfish and cruel nature seems loaded with His benefits. In looking round us, we often see a similar arrangement

of other gifts; we see riches, for example, in the very worst of hands; while those who from their principles and character are fitted to make the best use of them have often difficulty in securing the bare necessaries of life. How is this? Does God really govern, or do time and chance regulate all? If it were God's purpose to distribute His gifts exactly as men are able to estimate and use them aright, we should doubtless see a very different distribution; but God's aim in this world is much more to try and to train than to reward and fulfil. All these anomalies of Providence point to a future state. What God does we know not now, but we shall know hereafter. The misuse of God's gifts brings its punishment both here and in the life to come. To whom much is given, of them much shall be required. For those who have shown the capacity to use God's gifts aright, there will be splendid opportunities in another life. To those who have received much, but abused much, there comes a fearful reckoning, and a dismal experience of the "the unprofitable servant's doom."

The trial which Hannah had to bear was peculiarly heavy, as is well known, to a Hebrew woman. To have no child was not only a disappointment, but seemed to mark one out as dishonoured by God,—as unworthy of any part or lot in the means that were to bring about the fulfilment of the promise, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." In the case of Hannah, the trial was aggravated by the very presence of Peninnah and her children in the same household. Had she been alone, her mind might not have brooded over her want, and she and her husband might have so ordered their life as almost to forget the blank. But with Peninnah and

her children constantly before her eyes, such a course was impossible. She could never forget the contrast between the two wives. Like an aching tooth or an aching head, it bred a perpetual pain.

In many cases home affords a refuge from our trials, but in this case home was the very scene of the trial. There is another refuge from trial, which is very grateful to devout hearts—the house of God and the exercises of public worship. A member of Hannah's race, who was afterwards to pass through many a trial, was able even when far away, to find great comfort in the very thought of the house of God, with its songs of joy and praise, and its multitude of happy worshippers, and to rally his desponding feelings into cheerfulness and hope. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the health of His countenance." But from Hannah this resource likewise was cut off. The days of high festival were her days of bitter prostration.

It was the custom in religious households for the head of the house to give presents at the public festivals. Elkanah, a kind-hearted but not very discriminating man, kept up the custom, and as we suppose, to compensate Hannah for the want of children, he gave her at these times a worthy or double portion. But his kindness was inconsiderate. It only raised the jealousy of Peninnah. For her and her children to get less than the childless Hannah was intolerable. No sense of courtesy restrained her from uttering her feeling. No sisterly compassion urged her to spare the feelings of her rival. No regard for God or His worship kept back the storm of bitterness. With the reckless impetuosity of a bitter heart she took these opportunities to re-

proach Hannah with her childless condition. She knew the tender spot of her heart, and, instead of sparing it, she selected it as the very spot on which to plant her blows. Her very object was to give Hannah pain, to give her the greatest pain she could. And so the very place that should have been a rebuke to every bitter feeling, the very time which was sacred to joyous festivity, and the very sorrow that should have been kept furthest from Hannah's thoughts, were selected by her bitter rival to poison all her happiness, and overwhelm her with lamentation and woe.

After all, was Hannah or Peninnah the more wretched of the two? To suffer in the tenderest part of one's nature is no doubt a heavy affliction. But to have a heart eager to inflict such suffering on another is far more awful. Young people that sting a comrade when out of temper, that call him names, that reproach him with his infirmities, are far more wretched and pitiable creatures than those whom they try to irritate. It has always been regarded as a natural proof of the holiness of God that He has made man so that there is a pleasure in the exercise of his amiable feelings, while his evil passions, in the very play of them, produce pain and misery. Lady Macbeth is miserable over the murdered king, even while exulting in the triumph of her ambition. Torn by her heartless and reckless passions, her bosom is like a hell. The tumult in her raging soul is like the writhing of an evil spirit. Yes, my friends, if you accept the offices of sin, if you make passion the instrument of your purposes, if you make it your business to sting and to stab those who in some way cross your path, you may succeed for the moment, and you may experience whatever of satisfaction can be found in gloated revenge. But know this,

that you have been cherishing a viper in your bosom that will not content itself with fulfilling your desire. It will make itself a habitual resident in your heart, and distil its poison over it. It will make it impossible for you to know anything of the sweetness of love, the serenity of a well-ordered heart, the joy of trust, the peace of heaven. You will be like the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. You will find the truth of that solemn word, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

If the heart of Peninnah was actuated by this infernal desire to make her neighbour fret, it need not surprise us that she chose the most solemn season of religious worship to gratify her desire. What could religion be to such a one but a form? What communion could she have, or care to have, with God? How could she realize what she did in disturbing the communion of another heart? If we could suppose her realizing the presence of God, and holding soul-to-soul communion with Him, she would have received such a withering rebuke to her bitter feelings as would have filled her with shame and contrition. But when religious services are a mere form, there is absolutely nothing in them to prevent, at such times, the outbreak of the heart's worst passions. There are men and women whose visits to the house of God are often the occasions of rousing their worst, or at least very unworthy, passions. Pride, scorn, malice, vanity—how often are they moved by the very sight of others in the house of God! What strange and unworthy conceptions of Divine service such persons must have! What a dishonouring idea of God, if they imagine that the service of their bodies or of their lips is anything to Him. Surely in the hous-

of God, and in the presence of God, men ought to feel that among the things most offensive in His eyes are a foul heart, a fierce temper, and the spirit that hateth a brother. While, on the other hand, if we would serve Him acceptably, we must lay aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisies, envies and all evil speakings. Instead of trying to make others fret, we should try, young and old alike, to make the crooked places of men's hearts straight, and the rough places of their lives plain; try to give the soft answer that turneth away wrath; try to extinguish the flame of passion, to lessen the sum-total of sin, and stimulate all that is lovely and of good report in the world around us.

But to return to Hannah and her trial. Year by year it went on, and her sensitive spirit, instead of feeling it less, seemed to feel it more. It would appear that, on one occasion, her distress reached a climax. She was so overcome that even the sacred feast remained by her untasted. Her husband's attention was now thoroughly roused. "Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?" There was not much comfort in these questions. He did not understand the poor woman's feeling. Possibly his attempts to show her how little cause she had to complain only aggravated her distress. Perhaps she thought, "When my very husband does not understand me, it is time for me to cease from man." With the double feeling—my distress is beyond endurance, and there is no sympathy for me in any fellow-creature—the thought may have come into her mind, "I will arise and go to my Father." However it came about, her trials had the happy effect of sending her to God. Blessed fruit of affliction! Is

not this the reason why afflictions are often so severe? If they were of ordinary intensity, then, in the world's phrase, we might "grin and bear them." It is when they become intolerable that men think of God. As Archbishop Leighton has said, God closes up the way to every broken cistern, one after another, that He may induce you, baffled everywhere else, to take the way to the fountain of living waters. "I looked on my right hand and beheld, but there was no man that would know me; refuge failed me, no man cared for my soul. I cried unto thee, O Lord; I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living."

Behold Hannah, then, overwhelmed with distress, in "the temple of the Lord" (as His house at Shiloh was called), transacting solemnly with God. "She vowed a vow." She entered into a transaction with God, as really and as directly as one man transacts with another. It is this directness and distinctness of dealing with God that is so striking a feature in the piety of those early times. She asked God for a man child. But she did not ask this gift merely to gratify her personal wish. In the very act of dealing with God she felt that it was His glory and not her personal feelings that she was called chiefly to respect. No doubt she wished the child, and she asked the child in fulfilment of her own vehement desire. But beyond and above that desire there arose in her soul the sense of God's claim and God's glory, and to these high considerations she desired to subordinate every feeling of her own. If God should give her the man child, he would not be hers, but God's. He would be specially dedicated as a Nazarite to God's service. No razor should come on his head; no drop of strong drink should pass his lips. And this would not be a mere temporary dedication, it would last all

the days of his life. Eagerly though Hannah desired a son, she did not wish him merely for personal gratification. She was not to make herself the end of her child's existence, but would sacrifice even her reasonable and natural claims upon him in order that he might be more thoroughly the servant of God.

Hannah, as she continued praying, must have felt something of that peace of soul which ever comes from conscious communion with a prayer-hearing God. But probably her faith needed the element of strengthening which a kindly and favourable word from one high in God's service would have imparted. It must have been terrible for her to find, when the high priest spoke to her, that it was to insult her, and accuse her of an offence against decency itself from which her very soul would have recoiled. Well meaning, but weak and blundering, Eli never made a more outrageous mistake. With firmness and dignity, and yet in perfect courtesy, Hannah repudiated the charge. Others might try to drown their sorrows with strong drink, but she had poured out her soul before God. The high priest must have felt ashamed of his rude and unworthy charge, as well as rebuked by the dignity and self-possession of this much-tried but upright, godly woman. He sent her away with a hearty benediction, which seemed to convey to her an assurance that her prayer would be fulfilled. As yet it is all a matter of faith; but her "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Her burden is completely removed; her soul has returned to its quiet rest. This chapter of the history has a happy ending—"The woman went her way and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad."

Is not this whole history just like one of the Psalms, expressed not in words but in deeds? First the wail of distress; then the wrestling of the troubled heart with God; then the repose and triumph of faith. What a blessing, amid the multitude of this world's sorrows, that such a process should be practicable! What a blessed thing is faith, faith in God's word, and faith in God's heart, that faith which becomes a bridge to the distressed from the region of desolation and misery to the region of peace and joy? Is there any fact more abundantly verified than this experience is —this passage out of the depths, this way of shaking one's self from the dust, and putting on the garments of praise? Are any of you tired, worried, wearied in the battle of life, and yet ignorant of this blessed process? Do any receive your fresh troubles with nothing better than a growl of irritation—I will not say an angry curse? Alas for your thorny experience! an experience which knows no way of blunting the point of the thorns. Know, my friends, that in Gilead there is a balm for soothing these bitter irritations. There is a peace of God that passeth all understanding, and that keeps the hearts and minds of His people through Christ Jesus. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee."

But let those who profess to be Christ's see that they are consistent here. A fretful, complaining Christian is a contradiction in terms. How unlike to Christ! How forgetful such a one is of the grand argument, "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" "Be patient, brethren, for the coming of the Lord draweth near." Amid the agitations of life

often steal away to the green pastures and the still waters, and they will calm your soul. And while "the trial of your faith is much more precious than of gold that perisheth, although it be tried with fire," it shall be "found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

CHAPTER II.

HANNAH'S FAITH REWARDED.

1 Samuel i. 19—28.

IN all the transactions recorded in these verses, we see in Hannah the directing and regulating power of the family; while Elkanah appears acquiescing cordially in all that she proposes, and devoutly seconding her great act of consecration,—the surrender of Samuel to the perpetual service of God. For a moment it might be thought that Hannah assumed a place that hardly belonged to her; that she became the leader and director in the house, while her proper position was that of a helpmeet to her husband. We are constrained, however, to dismiss this thought, for it does not fit in to the character of Hannah, and it is not in keeping with the general tone of the passage. There are two reasons that account sufficiently for the part she took. In the first place, it was she that had dealt with God in the matter, and it was with her too that God had dealt. She had been God-directed in the earlier part of the transaction, and therefore was specially able to see what was right and proper to be done in following up God's remarkable acknowledgment and answer of her prayer. The course to be taken came to her as an intuition,—an intuition not to be reasoned about, not to be exposed to the criticism of another, to be simply accepted and obeyed. As she

gave no heed to those impulses of her own heart that might have desired a different destination for her child, so she was disposed to give none to the impulses of any other. The name, and the training, and the life-work of a child given so remarkably were all clear as sunbeams to her godly heart; and in such a matter it would have been nothing but weakness to confer with flesh and blood.

And in the second place, Elkanah could be in no humour to resist his wife, even if he had had any reason to do so. For he was in a manner reproved of God for not being more concerned about her sadness of spirit. God had treated her sorrow more seriously than he had. God had not said to her that her husband was better to her than ten sons. God had recognised the hunger of her heart for a son as a legitimate craving, and when she brought her wish to Him, and meekly and humbly asked Him to fulfil it, He had heard her prayer, and granted her request. In a sense Hannah, in the depth of her sorrow, had appealed from her husband to a higher court, and the appeal had been decided in her favour. Elkanah could not but feel that in faith, in lofty principle, in nearness of fellowship with God, he had been surpassed by his wife. It was no wonder he surrendered to her the future direction of a life given thus in answer to her prayers. Yet in thus surrendering his right he showed no sullenness of temper, but acted in harmony with her, not only in naming and dedicating the child, but in taking a vow on himself, and at the proper moment fulfilling that vow. The three bullocks, with the ephah of flour and the bottle of wine brought to Shiloh when the child was presented to the Lord, were probably the fulfilment of Elkanah's vow.

But to come more particularly to what is recorded in the text.

1. We notice, first, the fact of the answer to prayer. The answer was prompt, clear, explicit. It is an important question, Why are some prayers answered and not others? Many a good man and woman feel it to be the greatest trial that their prayers for definite objects are not answered. Many a mother will say, Why did God not answer me when I prayed Him to spare my infant's life? I am sure I prayed with my whole heart and soul, but it seemed to make no difference, the child sank and died just as if no one had been praying for him. Many a wife will say, Why does God not convert my husband? I have agonized, I have wept and made supplication on his behalf, and in particular, with reference to his besetting infirmity, I have implored God to break his chain and set him free; but there he is, the same as ever. Many a young person under serious impressions will say, Why does God not hear my prayer? I have prayed with heart and soul for faith and love, for peace in believing, for consciousness of my interest in Christ; but my prayers seem directed against a wall of brass, they seem never to reach the ears of the Lord of hosts. In spite of all such objections and difficulties, we maintain that God is the hearer of prayer. Every sincere prayer offered in the name of Christ is heard, and dealt with by God in such way as seems good to Him. There are good reasons why some prayers are not answered at all, and there are also good reasons why the visible answer to some prayers is delayed. Some prayers are not answered because the spirit of them is bad. "Ye ask but receive not because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." What is asked merely

to gratify a selfish feeling is asked amiss. It is not holy prayer; it does not fit in with the sacred purposes of life; it is not asked to make us better, or enable us to serve God better, or make our life more useful to our fellows; but simply to increase our pleasure, to make our surroundings more agreeable. Some prayers are not answered because what is asked would be hurtful; the prayer is answered in spirit though denied in form. A Christian lady, over the sick bed of an only son, once prayed with intense fervour that he might be restored, and positively refused to say, "Thy will be done." Falling asleep, she seemed to see a panorama of her son's life had he survived; it was a succession of sorrows, rising into terrible agonies,—so pitiful a sight that she could no longer desire his life to be prolonged, and gave up the battle against the will of God. Some prayers are not answered at the time, because a discipline of patience is needed for those who offer them; they have to be taught the grace of waiting patiently for the Lord; they have to learn more fully than hitherto to walk by faith, not by sight; they have to learn to take the promise of God against all appearances, and to remember that heaven and earth shall pass away, but God's word shall not pass away.

But whatever be the reasons for the apparent silence of God, we may rest assured that hearing prayer is the law of His kingdom. Old Testament and New alike bear witness to this. Every verse of the Psalms proclaims it. Alike by precept and example our Lord constantly enforced it. Every Apostle takes up the theme, and urges the duty and the privilege. We may say of prayer as St. Paul said of the resurrection—if prayer be not heard our preaching is vain, and your faith is vain. And what true Christian is there who

cannot add testimonies from his own history to the same effect? If the answer to some of your prayers be delayed, has it not come to many of them? Come, too, very conspicuously, so that you were amazed, and almost awed? And if there be prayers that have not yet been answered, or in reference to which you have no knowledge of an answer, can you not afford to wait till God gives the explanation? And when the explanation comes, have you not much cause to believe that it will redound to the praise of God, and that many things, in reference to which you could at the time see nothing but what was dark and terrible, may turn out when fully explained to furnish new and overwhelming testimony that "God is love?"

2. The next point is the name given by Hannah to her son. The name Samuel, in its literal import, does not mean "asked of the Lord," but "heard of the Lord." The reason assigned by Hannah for giving this name to her son is not an explanation of the word, but a reference to the circumstances. In point of fact, "heard of the Lord" is more expressive than even "asked of the Lord," because it was God's hearing (in a favourable sense), more than Hannah's asking, that was the decisive point in the transaction. Still, as far as Hannah was concerned, he was asked of the Lord. The name was designed to be a perpetual memorial of the circumstances of his birth. For the good of the child himself, and for the instruction of all that might come in contact with him, it was designed to perpetuate the fact that before his birth a solemn transaction in prayer took place between his mother and the Almighty. The very existence of this child was a perpetual witness, first of all of the truth that God exists, and then of the truth that He is a prayer-hearing God. The

very name of this child is a rebuke to those parents who never think of God in connection with their children, who never thank God for giving them, nor think of what He would like in their education and training. Even where no such special transaction by prayer has taken place as in the case of Samuel's mother, children are to be regarded as sacred gifts of God. "Lo, children are the heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is His reward." Many a child has had the name Samuel given him since these distant days in Judæa under the influence of this feeling. Many a parent has felt what a solemn thing it is to receive from God's hands an immortal creature, that may become either an angel or a devil, and to be entrusted with the first stage of a life that may spread desolation and misery on the one hand, or joy and blessing wherever its influence reaches. Do not treat lightly, O parents, the connection between God and your children! Cherish the thought that they are God's gifts, God's heritage to you, committed by Him to you to bring up, but not apart from Him, not in separation from those holy influences which He alone can impart, and which He is willing to impart. What a cruel thing it is to cut this early connection between them and God, and send them drifting through the world like a ship with a forsaken rudder, that flaps hither and thither with every current of the sea! What a blessed thing when, above all things, the grace and blessing of God are sought by parents for their children, when all the earnest lessons of childhood are directed to this end, and before childhood has passed into youth the grace of God rules the young heart, and the holy purpose is formed to live in His fear through Jesus Christ, and to honour Him for evermore!

3. Hannah's arrangements for the child. From the very first she had decided that at the earliest possible period he should be placed under the high priest at Shiloh. Hannah's fulfilment of her vow was to be an ample, prompt, honourable fulfilment. Many a one who makes vows or resolutions under the pressure and pinch of distress immediately begins to pare them down when the pinch is removed, like the merchant in the storm who vowed a hecatomb to Jupiter, then reduced the hecatomb to a single bullock, the bullock to a sheep, the sheep to a few dates; but even these he ate on the way to the altar, laying on it only the stones. Not one jot would Hannah abate of the full sweep and compass of her vow. She would keep the child by her only till he was weaned, and then he should be presented at Shiloh. It is said that Jewish mothers sometimes suckled their children to the age of three years, and this was probably little Samuel's age when he was taken to Shiloh. Meanwhile, she resolved that till that time was reached she would not go up to the feast. Had she gone before her son was weaned she must have taken him with her, and brought him away with her, and that would have broken the solemnity of the transaction when at last she should take him for good and all. No. The very first visit that she and her son should pay to Shiloh would be the decisive visit. The very first time that she should present herself at that holy place where God had heard her prayer and her vow would be the time when she should fulfil her vow. The first time that she should remind the high priest of their old interview would be when she came to offer to God's perpetual service the answer to her prayer and the fruit of her vow. To miss the feast would be a privation, it might even be a spiritual loss,

but she had in her son that which itself was a means of grace to her, and a blessed link to God and heaven; while she remained with him God would still remain with her; and in prayer for him, and the people whom he might one day influence, her heart might be as much enlarged and warmed as if she were mingling with the thousands of Israel, amid the holy excitement of the great national feast.

4. Elkanah's offering at Shiloh. When Elkanah heard his wife's plan with reference to Samuel, he simply acquiesced, bade her remain at Shiloh, "only the Lord establish His word." What word? Literally, the Lord had spoken no word about Samuel, unless the word of Eli to Hannah "The God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him" could be regarded as a word from God. That word, however, had already been fulfilled; and Elkanah's prayer meant, The Lord bring to pass those further blessings of which the birth of Samuel was the promise and the prelude; the Lord accept, in due time, the offering of this child to His service, and grant that out of that offering there may come to Israel all the good that it is capable of yielding.

The cordiality with which Elkanah accepted his wife's view of the case is seen further in the ample offering which he took to Shiloh—three bullocks, an ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine. One bullock would have sufficed as a burnt-offering for the child now given for the service of God, and in ver. 25 special mention is made of one being slain. The other two were added to mark the speciality of the occasion, to make the offering, so to speak, round and complete, to testify the ungrudging cordiality with which the whole transaction was entered into. One might perhaps have thought that in

connection with such a service there was hardly any need of a bloody sacrifice. A little child of two or three years old—the very type and picture of innocence—surely needed little in the way of expiation. Not so, however, the view of the law of Moses. Even a new-born infant could not be presented to the Lord without some symbol of expiation. There is such a virus of corruption in every human soul that not even infants can be brought to God for acceptance and blessing without a token of atonement. Sin has so separated the whole race from God, that not one member of it can be brought near, can be brought into the region of benediction, without shedding of blood. And if no member of it can be even accepted without atonement, much less can any be taken to be God's servant, taken to stand before Him, to represent Him, to be His organ to others, to speak in His name. What a solemn truth for all who desire to be employed in the public service of Jesus Christ! Remember how unworthy you are to stand before him. Remember how stained your garments are with sin and worldliness, how distracted your heart is with other thoughts and feelings, how poor the service is you are capable of rendering. Remember how gloriously Jesus is served by the angels that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His word. And when you give yourselves to Him, or ask to be allowed to take your place among His servants, seek as you do so to be sprinkled with the blood of cleansing, own your personal unworthiness, and pray to be accepted through the merit of His sacrifice!

5. And now, the bullock being slain, they bring the child to Eli. Hannah is the speaker, and her words are few and well chosen. She reminds Eli of what

she had done the last time she was there. Generous and courteous, she makes no allusion to anything unpleasant that had passed between them. Small matters of that sort are absorbed in the solemnity and importance of the transaction. In her words to Eli she touches briefly on the past, the present, and the future. What occurred in the past was, that she stood there a few years ago praying unto the Lord. What was true of the present was, that the Lord had granted her petition, and given her this child for whom she had prayed. And what was going to happen in the future was (as the Revised Version has it), "I have granted him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he is granted to the Lord."

It is interesting to remark that no word of Eli's is introduced. This Nazarite child is accepted for the perpetual service of God at once and without remark. No remonstrance is made on the score of his tender years. No doubt is insinuated as to how he may turn out. If Samuel's family was a Levitical one, he would have been entitled to take part in the service of God, but only occasionally, and at the Levitical age. But his mother brings him to the Lord long before the Levitical age, and leaves him at Shiloh, bound over to a lifelong service. How was she able to do it? For three years that child had been her constant companion, had lain in her bosom, had warmed her heart with his smiles, had amused her with his prattle, had charmed her with all his engaging little ways. How was she able to part with him? Would he not miss her too as much as she would miss him? Shiloh was not a very attractive place, Eli was old and feeble, Hophni and Phinehas were beasts, the atmosphere was offensive and pernicious. Nevertheless, it was God's house, and

if a little child should be brought to it, capable of rendering to God real service, God would take care of the child. Already he was God's child. Asked of God, and heard of God, he bore already the mark of his Master. God would be with him, as He had been with Joseph, as He had been with Moses—"He shall call on Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will be with him and honour him."

Noble in her spirit of endurance in the time of trial, Hannah is still more noble in the spirit of self-denial in the time of prosperity. It was no common grace that could so completely sacrifice all her personal feelings, and so thoroughly honour God. What a rebuke to those parents that keep back their children from God's service, that will not part with their sons to be missionaries, that look on the ministry of the Gospel as but a poor occupation! What a rebuke, too, to many Christian men and women who are so unwilling to commit themselves openly to any form of Christian service,—unwilling to be identified with religious work! Yet, on the other hand, let us rejoice that in this our age, more perhaps than in any other, so many are willing, nay eager, for Christian service. Let us rejoice that both among young men and young women recruits for the mission-field are offering themselves in such numbers. After all, it is true wisdom, and true policy, although not done as a matter of policy. It will yield far the greatest satisfaction in the end. God is not unrighteous to forget the work and labour of love of His children. And "every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for My name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

CHAPTER III.

HANNAH'S SONG OF THANKSGIVING.

1 Samuel ii. 1-10.

THE emotion that filled Hannah's breast after she had granted Samuel to the Lord, and left him settled at Shiloh, was one of triumphant joy. In her song we see no trace of depression, like that of a bereaved and desolate mother. Some may be disposed to think less of Hannah on this account; they may think she would have been more of a true mother if something of human regret had been apparent in her song. But surely we ought not to blame her if the Divine emotion that so completely filled her soul excluded for the time every ordinary feeling. In the very first words of her song we see how closely God was connected with the emotions that swelled in her breast. "My heart rejoiceth *in the Lord*, mine horn is exalted *in the Lord*." The feeling that was so rapturous was the sense of God's gracious owning of her; His taking her into partnership, so to speak, with Himself; His accepting of her son as an instrument for carrying out His gracious purposes to Israel and the world. Only those who have experienced it can understand the overwhelming blessedness of this feeling. That the infinite God should draw near to His sinful creature, and not only accept him, but identify Himself with him, as it

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were, taking him and those dearest to him into His confidence, and using them to carry out His plans, is something almost too wonderful for the human spirit to bear. This was Hannah's feeling, as it afterwards was that of Elizabeth, and still more of the Virgin Mary, and it is no wonder that their songs, which bear a close resemblance to each other, should have been used by the Christian Church to express the very highest degree of thankfulness.

The emotion of Hannah was intensified by another consideration. What had taken place in her experience was not the only thing of this kind that had ever happened or that ever was to happen. On the contrary, it was the outcome of a great law of God's kingdom, which law regulated the ordinary procedure of His providence. Hannah's heart was enlarged as she thought how many others had shared or would share what had befallen her; as she thought how such pride and arrogance as that which had tormented her was doomed to be rebuked and brought low under God's government; how many lowly souls that brought their burden to Him were to be relieved; and how many empty and hungry hearts, pining for food and rest, were to find how He "satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness"

But it would seem that her thoughts took a still wider sweep. Looking on herself as representing the nation of Israel, she seems to have felt that what had happened to her on a small scale was to happen to the nation on a large; for God would draw nigh to Israel as He had to her, make him His friend and confidential servant, humble the proud and malignant nations around him, and exalt him, if only he endeavoured humbly and thankfully to comply with the Divine will. Is it possible

that her thoughts took a more definite form? May not the Holy Spirit have given her a glimpse of the great truth—"Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given"? May she not have surmised that it was to be through one born in the same land that the great redemption was to be achieved? May she not have seen in her little Samuel the type and symbol of another Child, to be more wonderfully born than hers, to be dedicated to God's service in a higher sense, to fulfil all righteousness far beyond anything in Samuel's power? And may not this high theme, carrying her far into future times, carrying her on to the end of the world's history, bearing her up even to eternity and infinity, have been the cause of that utter absence of human regret, that apparent want of motherly heart-sinking, which we mark in the song?

When we examine the substance of the song more carefully, we find that Hannah derives her joy from four things about God:—1. His nature (vv. 2-3); 2. His providential government (vv. 4-8); 3. His most gracious treatment of His saints (v. 9); 4. The glorious destiny of the kingdom of His anointed.

1. In the second and third verses we find comfort derived from (1) God's holiness, (2) His unity, (3) His strength, (4) His knowledge, and (5) His justice.

(1) The *holiness*, the spotlessness of God is a source of comfort,—"There is none holy as the Lord." To the wicked this attribute is no comfort, but only a terror. Left to themselves, men take away this attribute, and, like the Greeks and Romans and other pagans, ascribe to their gods the lusts and passions of poor human creatures. Yet to those who *can* appreciate it, how blessed a thing is the holiness of God! No darkness in Him, no corruption, no infirmity; absolutely pure,

He governs all on the principles of absolute purity; He keeps all up, even in a sinful, crumbling world, to that high standard; and when His schemes are completed, the blessed outcome will be "the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

(2) His *unity* gives comfort,—"There is none besides Thee." None to thwart His righteous and gracious plans, or make those to tremble whose trust is placed in Him. He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, "What doest Thou?"

(3) His *strength* gives comfort,—"Neither is there any rock like our God." "If God be for us, who can be against us?" "Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, nor is weary? There is no searching of His understanding? He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint."

(4) His *knowledge* gives comfort,—"The Lord is a God of knowledge." He sees all secret wickedness, and knows how to deal with it. His eye is on every plot hatched in the darkness. He knows His faithful servants, what they aim at, what they suffer, what a strain is often put on their fidelity. And He never can forget them, and never can desert them, for "the angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear Him, and delivereth them."

(5) His *justice* gives comfort. "By Him actions are weighed." Their true quality is ascertained; what is done for mean, selfish ends stands out before Him in all its native ugliness, and draws down the retribution that is meet. Men may perform the outward services of religion with great regularity and apparent zeal, while their hearts are full of all uncleanness and wickedness. The hypocrite may rise to honour, the thief may become rich, men that prey upon the infirmities or the simplicity of their fellows may prosper; but there is a God in heaven by Whom all evil devices are weighed, and Who in His own time will effectually checkmate all that either deny His existence or fancy they can elude His righteous judgment.

2. These views of God's holy government are more fully enlarged on in the second part of the song (vv. 3-8). The main feature of God's providence dwelt on here is the changes that occur in the lot of certain classes. The class against whom God's providence bears chiefly is the haughty, the self-sufficient, the men of physical might who are ready to use that might to the injury of others. Those again who lie in the path of God's mercies are the weak, the hungry, the childless, the beggar. Hannah uses a variety of figures. Now it is from the profession of soldiers—"the bows of the mighty are broken"; and on the other hand they that for very weakness were stumbling and staggering are girded with strength. Now it is from the appetite for food—they that were full have had to hire out themselves for bread, and they that were hungry are hungry no more. Now it is from family life, and from a feature of family life that came home to Hannah—"the barren hath borne seven, and she that had many children is waxed feeble." And these changes are the doing of

God, "The Lord killeth and maketh alive; He bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich, He bringeth low and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory; for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and He hath set the world upon them." If nothing were taught here but that there are great vicissitudes of fortune among men, then a lesson would come from it alike to high and low—let the high beware lest they glory in their fortune, let the low not sink into dejection and despair. If it be further borne in mind that these changes of fortune are all in the hands of God, a further lesson arises, to beware how we offend God, and to live in the earnest desire to enjoy His favour. But there is a further lesson. The class of qualities that are here marked as offensive to God are pride, self-seeking, self-sufficiency both in ordinary matters and in their spiritual development. Your tyrannical and haughty Pharaohs, your high-vaunting Sennacheribs, your pride-intoxicated Nebuchadnezzars, are objects of special dislike to God. So is your proud Pharisee, who goes up to the temple thanking God that he is not as other men, no, nor like that poor publican, who is smiting on his breast, as well such a sinner may. It is the lowly in heart that God takes pleasure in. "Thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, and whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and in the holy place, but with him also that is of a humble and contrite heart; to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite one."

When we turn to the song of the Virgin we find the same strain—"He hath showed strength with His

arm, He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away." Undoubtedly these words have primary reference to the social conditions of men. Thanks are given that the highest privilege that God could bestow on a creature had been conferred not on any one rolling in luxury, but on a maiden of the lowest class. This meaning does not exhaust the scope of the thanksgiving, which doubtless embraces that law of the spiritual kingdom to which Christ gave expression in the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Yet it is plain that both the song of Hannah and the song of Mary dwell with complacency on that feature of providence by which men of low degree are sometimes exalted, by which the beggar is sometimes lifted from the dunghill, and set among princes to inherit the throne of glory. Why is this? Can God have any sympathy with the spirit which often prevails in the bosom of the poor towards the rich, which rejoices in their downfall just because they are rich, and in the elevation of others simply because they belong to the same class with themselves? The thought is not to be entertained for a moment. In God's government there is nothing partial or capricious. But the principle is this. Riches, fulness, luxury are apt to breed pride and contempt of the poor; and it pleases God at times, when such evil fruits appear, to bring down these worthless rich men to the dust, in order to give a conspicuous rebuke to the vanity, the ambition, the remorseless selfishness which were so conspicuous in their character. What but this was

the lesson from the sudden fall of Cardinal Wolsey? Men, and even the best of men, thanked God for that fall. Not that it gave them pleasure to see a poor wretch who had been clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, reduced to so pitiful a plight; but because they felt it a righteous thing and a wholesome thing that so proud and so wicked a career should be terminated by a conspicuous manifestation of the displeasure of God. The best instincts of men's nature longed for a check to the monstrous pride and wicked avarice of that man; and when that check was given, and given with such tremendous emphasis, there was not an honest man or woman in all England who did not utter a hearty "Praise God!" when they heard the terrible news.

So also it pleases God to give conspicuous proofs from time to time that qualities that in poor men are often associated with a hard-working, humble career are well-pleasing in His sight. For what qualities on the part of the poor are so valuable, in a social point of view, as industry, self-denying diligence, systematic, unwearying devotion even to work which brings them such scanty remuneration? By far the greater part of such men and women are called to work on, unnoticed and unrewarded, and when their day is over to sink into an undistinguished grave. But from time to time some such persons rise to distinction. The class to which they belong is ennobled by their achievements. When God wished in the sixteenth century to achieve the great object of punishing the Church which had fallen into such miserable inefficiency and immorality, and wrenching half of Europe from its grasp, he found his principal agent in a poor miner's cottage in Saxony. When he desired to summon a sleeping Church to the

great work of evangelising India, the man he called to the front was Carey, a poor cobbler of Northampton. When it was his purpose to present His Church with an unrivalled picture of the Christian pilgrimage, its dangers and trials, its joys, its sorrows, and its triumphs, the artist appointed to the task was John Bunyan, the tinker of Elstow. When the object was to provide a man that would open the great continent of Africa to civilisation and Christianity, and who needed, in order to do this, to face dangers and trials before which all ordinary men had shrunk, he found his agent in a poor spinner-boy, who was working twelve hours a day in a cotton mill on the banks of the Clyde. In all such matters, in humbling the rich and exalting the poor, God's object is not to punish the one because they are rich, or to exalt the other because they are poor. In the one case it is to punish vices bred from an improper use of wealth, and in the other to reward virtues that have sprung from the soil of poverty. "Poor *and* pious parents," wrote David Livingstone on the tombstone of his parents at Hamilton, when he wished to record the grounds of his thankfulness for the position in life which they held. "I would not exchange my peasant father for any king," said Thomas Carlyle, when he thought of the gems of Christian worth that had shone out all the brighter amid the hard conditions of his father's life. Riches are no reproach, and poverty is no merit; but the pride so apt to be bred of riches, the idleness, the injustice, the selfishness so often associated with them, is what God likes to reprove; and the graces that may be found in the poor man's home, the unwearied devotion to duty, the neighbourliness and brotherly love, and above all the faith, the hope, and the charity are what He delights to honour.

In the spiritual sense there is no more important ingredient of character in God's sight than the sense of emptiness, and the conviction that all goodness, all strength, all blessing must come from God. The heart, thus emptied, is prepared to welcome the grace that is offered to supply its needs. Air rushes into an exhausted receiver. Where the idea prevails either that we are possessed of considerable native goodness, or that we have only to take pains with ourselves to get it, there is no welcome for the truth that "by grace are ye saved." Whoever says, "I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing," knows not that "he is wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Miserable they who live and die in this delusion! Happy they who have been taught, "In me dwelleth no good thing." "All my springs are in Thee." Jesus Christ "is made to us of God wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption." "Out of His fulness have we all received, and grace for grace."

3. The third topic in Hannah's song is God's very gracious treatment of His saints. "He will keep the feet of His saints." The term "feet" shows the reference to be to their earthly life, their steps, their course through the world. It is a promise which others would care for but little, but which is very precious to all believers. To know the way in which God would have one to go is of prime importance to every godly heart. To be kept from wandering into unblest ways, kept from trifling with temptation, and dallying with sin is an infinite blessing. "Oh that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect unto all Thy commandments." "He will keep the feet of His saints."

4. And lastly, Hannah rejoices in that dispensation of mercy that was coming in connection with God's "king, His anointed" (v. 10). Guided by the Spirit, she sees that a king is coming, that a kingdom is to be set up, and ruled over by the Lord's anointed. She sees that God's blessing is to come down on the king, the anointed, and that under him the kingdom is to prosper and to spread. Did she catch a glimpse of what was to happen under such kings as David, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah? Did she see in prophetic vision the loving care of such kings for the welfare of the people, their holy zeal for God, their activity and earnestness in doing good? And did the glimpse of these coming benefits suggest to her the thought of what was to be achieved by Him who was to be the anointed one, the Messiah in a higher sense? We can hardly avoid giving this scope to her song. It was but a small measure of these blessings that her son personally could bring about. Her son seems to give place to a higher Son, through whom the land would be blessed as no one else could have blessed it, and all hungry and thirsty souls would be guided to that living bread and living water of which whosoever ate and drank should never hunger or thirst again.

What is the great lesson of this song? That for the answer to prayer, for deliverance from trial, for the fulfilment of hopes, for the glorious things yet spoken of the city of our God, our most cordial thanksgivings are due to God. Every Christian life presents numberless occasions that very specially call for such thanksgiving. But there is one thankgiving that must take precedence of all—"Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abun-

dant mercy hath begotten us again unto a living hope, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last day."

CHAPTER IV.

ELI'S HOUSE.

1 Samuel ii. 11-36.

THE notices of little Samuel, that alternate in this passage with the sad accounts of Eli and his house, are like the green spots that vary the dull stretches of sand in a desert; or like the little bits of blue sky that charm your eye when the firmament is darkened by a storm. First we are told how, after Elkanah and Hannah departed, the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli the priest (v. 11); then comes an ugly picture of the wickedness practised at Shiloh by Eli's sons (vv. 12-17); another episode brings Samuel again before us, with some details of his own history and that of his family (vv. 18-21); this is followed by an account of Eli's feeble endeavours to restrain the wickedness of his sons (vv. 22-25). Once more we have a bright glimpse of Samuel, and of his progress in life and character, very similar in terms to St. Luke's account of the growth of the child Jesus (v. 26); and finally the series closes with a painful narrative—the visit of a man of God to Eli, reproving his guilty laxity in connection with his sons, and announcing the downfall of his house (vv. 27-36). In the wickedness of Eli's sons we see the enemy coming in like a flood, in the progress of little Samuel

we see the Spirit of the Lord lifting up a standard against him. We see evil powerful and most destructive; we see the instrument of healing very feeble —a mere infant. Yet the power of God is with the infant, and in due time the force which he represents will prevail. It is just a picture of the grand conflict of sin and grace in the world. It was verified emphatically when Jesus was a child. How slender the force seemed that was to scatter the world's darkness, roll back its wickedness, and take away its guilt! How striking the lesson for us not to be afraid though the apparent force of truth and goodness in the world be infinitesimally small. The worm Jacob shall yet thresh the mountains; the little flock shall yet possess the kingdom; "there shall be a handful of corn on the top of the mountains, the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon, and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth."

It is mainly the picture of Eli's house and the behaviour of his family that fills our eye in this chapter. It is to be noticed that Eli was a descendant, not of Eleazar, the elder son of Aaron, but of Ithamar, the younger. Why the high priesthood was transferred from the one family to the other, in the person of Eli, we do not know. Evidently Eli's claim to the priesthood was a valid one, for in the reproof addressed to him it is fully assumed that he was the proper occupant of the office. One is led to think that either from youth or natural feebleness the proper heir in Eleazar's line had been unfit for the office, and that Eli had been appointed to it as possessing the personal qualifications which the other wanted. Probably therefore he was a man of vigour in his earlier days, one capable of being at the head of affairs; and if so his loose

government of his family was all the more worthy of blame. It could not have been that the male line in Eleazar's family had failed; for in the time of David Zadok of the family of Eleazar was priest, along with Abiathar, of the family of Ithamar and Eli. From Eli's administration great things would seem to have been expected; all the more lamentable and shameful was the state of things that ensued.

1. First our attention is turned to the gross wickedness and scandalous behaviour of Eli's sons. There are many dark pictures in the history of Israel in the time of the Judges,—pictures of idolatry, pictures of lust, pictures of treachery, pictures of bloodshed; but there is none more awful than the picture of the high priest's family at Shiloh. In the other cases members of the nation had become grossly wicked; but in this case it is the salt that has lost its savour—it is those who should have led the people in the ways of God that have become the ringleaders of the devil's army. Hophni and Phinehas take their places in that unhonoured band where the names of Alexander Borgia, and many a high ecclesiastic of the Middle Ages send forth their stinking savour. They are marked by the two prevailing vices of the lowest natures—greed and lechery. Their greed preys upon the worthy men who brought their offerings to God's sanctuary in obedience to His law; their lechery seduces the very women who, employed in the service of the place (see Revised Version), might have reasonably thought of it as the gate to heaven rather than the avenue of hell. So shameless were they in both kinds of vice that they were at no pains to conceal either the one or the other. It mattered nothing what regulations God had made as to the parts of the offering the priest was to have;

down went their fork into the sacrificial caldron, and whatever it drew up became theirs. It mattered not that the fat of certain sacrifices was due to God, and that it ought to have been given off before any other use was made of the flesh; the priests claimed the flesh in its integrity, and if the offerer would not willingly surrender it their servant fell upon him and wrenched it away. It is difficult to say whether the greater hurt was inflicted by such conduct on the cause of religion or on the cause of ordinary morality. As for the cause of religion, it suffered that terrible blow which it always suffers whenever it is dissociated from morality. The very heart and soul is torn out of religion when men are led to believe that their duty consists in merely believing certain dogmas, attending to outward observances, paying dues, and "performing" worship. What kind of conception of God can men have who are encouraged to believe that justice, mercy, and truth have nothing to do with His service? How can they ever think of Him as a Spirit, who requires of them that worship Him that they worship Him in spirit and in truth? How can such religion give men a real veneration for God, or inspire them with that spirit of obedience, trust, and delight of which he ought ever to be the object? Under such religion all belief in God's existence tends to vanish. Though His existence may continue to be acknowledged, it is not a power, it has no influence; it neither stimulates to good nor restrains from evil. Religion becomes a miserable form, without life, without vigour, without beauty—a mere carcase deserving only to be buried out of sight.

And if such a condition of things is fatal to religion, it is fatal to morality too. Men are but too ready by nature to play loose with conscience. But when the

religious heads of the nation are seen at once robbing man and robbing God, and when this is done apparently with impunity, it seems foolish to ordinary men to mind moral restraints. "Why should we mind the barriers of conscience" (the young men of Israel might argue) "when these young priests disregard them? If we do as the priest does we shall do very well." Men of corrupt lives at the head of religion, who are shameless in their profligacy, have a lowering effect on the moral life of the whole community. Down and down goes the standard of living. Class after class gets infected. The mischief spreads like dry rot in a building; ere long the whole fabric of society is infected with the poison.

2. And how did the high priest deal with this state of things? In the worst possible way. He spoke against it but he did not act against it. He showed that he knew of it, he owned it to be very wicked; but he contented himself with words of remonstrance, which in the case of such hardened transgression were of no more avail than a child's breath against a brazen wall. At the end of the day, it is true that Eli was a decrepit old man, from whom much vigour of action could not have been expected. But the evil began before he was so old and decrepit, and his fault was that he did not restrain his sons at the time when he ought and might have restrained them. Yes, but even if Eli was old and decrepit when the actual state of things first burst on his view, there was enough of the awful in the conduct of his sons to have roused him to unwonted activity. David was old and decrepit, lying feebly at the edge of death, when word was brought to him that Adonijah had been proclaimed king in place of Solomon, for whom he had destined the throne.

But there was enough of the startling in this intelligence to bring back a portion of its youthful fire to David's heart, and set him to devise the most vigorous measures to prevent the mischief that was so ready to be perpetrated. Fancy King David sending a meek message to Adonijah—"Nay, my son, it is not on your head but on Solomon's that my crown is to rest; go home, my son, and do nothing more in a course hurtful to yourself and hurtful to your people." But; it was this foolish and most inefficient course that Eli took with his sons. Had he acted as he should have acted at the beginning, matters would never have come to such a flagrant pass. But when the state of things became so terrible, there was but one course that should have been thought of. When the wickedness of the acting priests was so outrageous that men abhorred the offering of the Lord, the father ought to have been sunk in the high priest; the men who had so dishonoured their office should have been driven from the place, and the very remembrance of the crime they had committed should have been obliterated by the holy lives and holy service of better men. It was inexcusable in Eli to allow them to remain. If he had had a right sense of his office he would never for one moment have allowed the interest of his family to outweigh the claims of God. What! Had God in the wilderness, by a solemn and deadly judgment, removed from office and from life the two elder sons of Aaron simply because they had offered strange fire in their censers? And what was the crime of offering strange fire compared to the crime of robbing God, of violating the Decalogue, of openly practising gross and daring wickedness, under the very shadow of the tabernacle? If Eli did not take steps for stopping these atrocious proceedings, he

might rely on it that steps would be taken in another quarter—God Himself would mark His sense of the sin.

For what were the interests of his sons compared with the credit of the national worship? What mattered it that the sudden stroke would fall on them with startling violence? If it did not lead to their repentance and salvation it would at least save the national religion from degradation, and it would thus bring benefit to tens of thousands in the land. All this Eli did not regard. He could not bring himself to be harsh to his own sons. He could not bear that they should be disgraced and degraded. He would satisfy himself with a mild remonstrance, notwithstanding that every day new disgrace was heaped on the sanctuary, and new encouragement given to others to practise wickedness, by the very men who should have been foremost in honouring God, and sensitive to every breath that would tarnish His name.

How differently God's servants acted in other days! How differently Moses acted when he came down from the mount and found the people worshipping the golden calf! "It came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands and brake them beneath the mount. And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strawed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it. . . . And Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put

every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate through the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour." Do we think this too sharp and severe a retribution? At all events it marked in a suitable way the enormity of the offence of Aaron and the people, and the awful provocation of Divine judgments which the affair of the golden calf implied. It denoted that in presence of such a sin the claims of kindred were never for a moment to be thought of; and in the blessing of Moses it was a special commendation of the zeal of Levi, that "he said unto his father, and to his mother, I have not seen him, neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children." It was the outrageous character of the offence in the matter of the golden calf that justified the severe and abrupt procedure; but it was Eli's condemnation that though the sin of his sons was equally outrageous, he was moved to no indignation, and took no step to rid the tabernacle of men so utterly unworthy.

It is often very difficult to explain how it comes to pass that godly men have had ungodly children. There is little difficulty in accounting for this on the present occasion. There was a fatal defect in the method of Eli. His remonstrance with his sons is not made at the proper time. It is not made in the fitting tone. When disregarded, it is not followed up by the proper consequences. We can easily think of Eli letting the boys have their own will and their own way when they were young; threatening them for disobedience, but not executing the threat; angry at them when they did wrong, but not punishing the offence; vacillating perhaps between occasional severity and habitual in-

dulgence, till by-and-bye all fear of sinning had left them, and they coolly calculated that the grossest wickedness would meet with nothing worse than a reproof. How sad the career of the young men themselves! We must not forget that, however inexcusable their father was, the great guilt of the proceeding was theirs. How must they have hardened their hearts against the example of Eli, against the solemn claims of God, against the holy traditions of the service, against the interests and claims of those whom they ruined, against the welfare of God's chosen people! How terribly did their familiarity with sacred things react on their character, making them treat even the holy priesthood as a mere trade, a trade in which the most sacred interests that could be conceived were only as counters, to be turned by them into gain and sensual pleasure! Could anything come nearer to the sin against the Holy Ghost? No wonder though their doom was that of persons judicially blinded and hardened. They were given up to a reprobate mind, to do those things that were not convenient. "They hearkened not to the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them." They experienced the fate of men who deliberately sin against the light, who love their lusts so well that nothing will induce them to fight against them; they were so hardened that repentance became impossible, and it was necessary for them to undergo the full retribution of their wickedness.

3. But it is time we should look at the message brought to Eli by the man of God. In that message Eli was first reminded of the gracious kindness shown to the house of Aaron in their being entrusted with the priesthood, and in their having an honourable provision secured for them. Next he is asked why he trampled

on God's sacrifice and offering (marg. Revised Version), and considered the interests of his sons above the honour of God? Then he is told that any previous promise of the perpetuity of his house is now qualified by the necessity God is under to have regard to the character of his priests, and honour or degrade them accordingly. In accordance with this rule the house of Eli would suffer a terrible degradation. He (this includes his successors in office) would be stript of "his arm," that is, his strength. No member of his house would reach a good old age. The establishment at Shiloh would fall more and more into decay, as if there was an enemy in God's habitation. Any who might remain of the family would be a grief and distress to those whom Eli represented. The young men themselves, Hophni and Phinehas, would die the same day. Those who shared their spirit would come crouching to the high priest of the day and implore him to put them into one of the priest's offices, not to give them the opportunity of serving God, but that they might eat a piece of bread. Terrible catalogue of curses and calamities! Oh, sin, what a brood of sorrows dost thou bring forth! Oh, young man, who walkest in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes, what a myriad of distresses dost thou prepare for those whom thou art most bound to care for and to bless! Oh, minister of the gospel, who allowest thyself to tamper with the cravings of the flesh till thou hast brought ruin on thyself, disgrace on thy family, and confusion on thy Church, what infatuation was it to admit thy worst foe to the sanctuary of thy bosom, and allow him to establish himself in the citadel till thou couldst not get quit of him, so that thou art now helpless in his hands, with nothing but sadness for thy present

inheritance, and for the future a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation!

One word, in conclusion, respecting that great principle of the kingdom of God announced by the prophet as that on which Jehovah would act in reference to His priests—"Them that honour Me I will honour, but they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed." It is one of the grandest sayings in Scripture. It is the eternal rule of the kingdom of God, not limited to the days of Hophni and Phinehas, but, like the laws of the Medes and Persians, eternal as the ordinances of heaven. It is a law confirmed by all history; every man's life confirms it, for though this life is but the beginning of our career, and the final clearing up of Divine providence is to be left to the judgment-day, yet when we look back on the world's history we find that those that have honoured God, God has honoured them, while they that have despised Him have indeed been lightly esteemed. However men may try to get their destiny into their own hands; however they may secure themselves from this trouble and from that; however, like the first Napoleon, they may seem to become omnipotent, and to wield an irresistible power, yet the day of retribution comes at last; having sown to the flesh, of the flesh also they reap corruption. While the men that have honoured God, the men that have made their own interests of no account, but have set themselves resolutely to obey God's will and do God's work; the men that have believed in God as the holy Ruler and Judge of the world, and have laboured in private life and in public service to carry out the great rules of His kingdom,—justice, mercy, the love of God and the love of man,—these are the men that God has honoured;

these are the men whose work abides; these are the men whose names shine with undying honour, and from whose example and achievements young hearts in every following age draw their inspiration and encouragement. What a grand rule of life it is, for old and young! Do you wish a maxim that shall be of high service to you in the voyage of life, that shall enable you to steer your barque safely both amid the open assaults of evil, and its secret currents, so that, however tossed you may be, you may have the assurance that the ship's head is in the right direction, and that you are moving steadily towards the desired haven; where can you find anything more clear, more fitting, more sure and certain than just these words of the Almighty, "Them that honour Me I will honour; but they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed"?

CHAPTER V.

SAMUEL'S VISION.

1 Samuel iii.

IT is evident that Samuel must have taken very kindly to the duties of the sanctuary. He was manifestly one of those who are sanctified from infancy, and whose hearts go from the first with sacred duties. There were no wayward impulses to subdue, no hankerings after worldly freedom and worldly enjoyment; there was no necessity for coercive measures, either to restrain him from outbursts of frivolity or to compel him to diligence and regularity in his calling. From the first he looked with solemn awe and holy interest on all that related to the worship of God; that, to him, was the duty above all other duties, the privilege above all other privileges. God to him was not a mere idea, an abstraction, representing merely the dogmas and services of religion. God was a reality, a personality, a Being who dealt very closely with men, and with whom they were called to deal very closely too. We can easily conceive how desirous little Samuel would be to know something of the meaning of the services at Shiloh; how scrupulous to perform every duty, how regular and real in his prayers, and how full of reverence and affection for God. He would go about all his duties with a grave,

sweet, earnest face, conscious of their importance and solemnity; always thinking more of them than of anything else,—thinking perhaps of the service of the angels in heaven, and trying to serve God as they served Him, to do God's will on earth as it was done in heaven.

At the opening of this chapter he seems to be the confidential servant of the high priest, sleeping near to him, and in the habit of receiving directions from him. He must be more than a child now, otherwise he would not be entrusted, as he was, with the opening of the doors of the house of the Lord.

The evil example of Hophni and Phinehas, so far from corrupting him, seems to have made him more resolute the other way. It was horrid and disgusting; and as gross drunkenness on the part of a father sometimes sets the children the more against it, so the profligacy of the young priests would make Samuel more vigilant in every matter of duty. That Eli bore as he did with the conduct of his sons must have been a great perplexity to him, and a great sorrow; but it did not become one at his time of life to argue the question with the aged high priest. This conduct of Eli's did not in any respect diminish the respectful bearing of Samuel towards him, or his readiness to comply with his every wish. For Eli was God's high priest; and in engaging to be God's servant in the tabernacle Samuel knew well that he took the high priest as his earthly master.

1. The first thing that engages our special attention in this chapter is the singular way in which Samuel was called to receive God's message in the temple.

The word of God was rare in those days; there was no open vision, or rather no vision that came abroad,

that was promulgated to the nation as the expression of God's will. From the tone in which this is referred to, it was evidently looked on as a want, as placing the nation in a less desirable position than in days when God was constantly communicating His will. Now, however, God is to come into closer contact with the people, and for this purpose He is to employ a new instrument as the medium of His messages. For God is never at a loss for suitable instruments—they are always ready when peculiar work has to be done. In the selection of the boy Samuel as his prophet there is something painful, but likewise something very interesting. It is painful to find the old high priest passed over; his venerable years and venerable office would naturally have pointed to him; but in spite of many good qualities, in one point he is grossly unfaithful, and the very purpose of the vision now to be made is to declare the outcome of his faithlessness. But it is interesting to find that already the child of Hannah is marked out for this distinguished service. Even in his case there is opportunity for verifying the rule, "Them that honour Me I will honour." His entire devotion to God's service, so beautiful in one of such tender years, is the sign of a character well adapted to become the medium of God's habitual communications with His people. Young though he is, his very youth in one sense will prove an advantage. It will show that what he speaks is not the mere fruit of his own thinking, but is the message of God. It will show that the spiritual power that goes forth with his words is not his own native force, but the force of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. It will thus be made apparent to all that God has not forsaken His people, corrupt and lamentably wicked though the young priests are.

Both Eli and Samuel sleep within the precincts of the tabernacle. Not, however, in the sanctuary itself, but in one of those buildings that opened into its courts, which were erected for the accommodation of the priests and Levites. Eli's sight was failing him, and perhaps the care of the lamp as well as the door was entrusted to Samuel. The lamp was to burn always (Exod. xxvii. 20), that is, it was to be trimmed and lighted every morning and evening (Exod. xxx. 7, 8); and to attend to this was primarily the high priest's duty. The lamp had doubtless been duly trimmed, and it would probably continue burning through a good part of the night. It was not yet out when a voice fell on the ears of Samuel, loud enough to rouse him from the profound slumber into which he had probably fallen. Thinking it was Eli's, he ran to his side; but Eli had not called him. Again the voice sounded, again Samuel springs to his feet and hastens to the high priest; again he is sent back with the same assurance. A third time the voice calls; a third time the willing and dutiful Samuel flies to Eli's side, but this time he is sent back with a different answer. Hitherto Samuel had not known the Lord—that is, he had not been cognisant of His way of communicating with men in a supernatural form—and it had never occurred to him that such a thing could happen in his case. But Eli knew that such communications were made at times by God, and, remembering the visit of the man of God to himself, he may have surmised that this was another such occasion. The voice evidently was no natural voice; so Samuel is told to lie down once more, to take the attitude of simple receptiveness, and humbly invite God to utter His message.

There are some lesser traits of Samuel's character in this part of the transaction which ought not to be passed over without remark. The readiness with which he springs from his bed time after time, and the meekness and patience with which he asks Eli for his orders, without a word of complaint on his apparently unreasonable conduct, make it very clear that Samuel had learned to subdue two things—to subdue his body and to subdue his temper. It is not an easy thing for a young person in the midst of a deep sleep to spring to his feet time after time. In such circumstances the body is very apt to overcome the mind. But Samuel's mind overcame the body. The body was the servant, not the master. What an admirable lesson Samuel had already learned! Few parts of early education are so important as to learn to keep the body in subjection. To resist bodily cravings, whether greater or smaller, which unfit one for duty; temptations to drink, or smoke, or dawdle, or lie in bed, or waste time when one ought to be up and doing; to be always ready for one's work, punctual, methodical, purpose-like, save only when sickness intervenes,—denotes a very admirable discipline for a young person, and is a sure token of success in life. Not less admirable is that control over the temper which Samuel had evidently acquired. To be treated by Eli as he supposed that he had been, was highly provoking. Why drag him out of bed at that time of night at all? Why drag him over the cold stones in the chill darkness, and why tantalise him first by denying that he called him and then by calling him again? As far as appears, Samuel's temper was in no degree ruffled by the treatment he appeared to be receiving from Eli; he felt that he was a servant, and Eli was his master, and it was his

part to obey his master, however unreasonable his treatment might be.

2. We proceed now to the message itself, and Samuel's reception of it. It is substantially a repetition of what God had already communicated to Eli by the man of God a few years before; only it is more peremptory, and the bearing of it is more fixed and rigid. When God denounced His judgment on Eli's house by the prophet, he seems to have intended to give them an opportunity to repent. If Eli had bestirred himself then, and banished the young men from Shiloh, and if his sons in their affliction and humiliation had repented of their wickedness, the threatened doom might have been averted. So at least we are led to believe by this second message having been superadded to the first. Now the opportunity of repentance has passed away. God's words are very explicit—"I have sworn unto the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever." After the previous warning, Eli seems to have gone on lamenting but not chastising. Hophni and Phinehas seem to have gone on sinning as before, and heedless of the scandal they were causing. In announcing to Samuel the coming catastrophe, God shows Himself thoroughly alive to the magnitude of the punishment He is to inflict, and the calamity that is to happen. It is such that the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. God shows also that, painful though it is, it has been deliberately determined, and no relenting will occur when once the terrible retribution begins. "In that day will I perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house; when I begin I will also make an end." But terrible though the punishment will be, there is only too good cause for it. "For I have told him that I will judge

his house for ever, for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." There are some good parents whose sons have made themselves vile, and they would fain have restrained them but their efforts to restrain have been in vain. The fault of Eli was, that he might have restrained them and he did not restrain them. In those times fathers had more authority over their families than is given them now. The head of the house was counted responsible for the house, because it was only by his neglecting the power he had that his family could become openly wicked. It was only by Eli neglecting the power he had that his sons could have become so vile. Where his sons were heirs to such sacred functions there was a double call to restrain them, and that call he neglected. He neglected it at the time when he might have done it, and that time could never be recalled.

So, there is an age when children may be restrained, and if that age is allowed to pass the power of restraining them goes along with it. There are faults in this matter on the part of many parents, on the right hand and on the left. Many err by not restraining at all. Mothers begin while their children are yet infants to humour their every whim, and cannot bear to hold back from them anything they may wish. It is this habit that is liable to have such a terrible reaction. There are other parents that while they restrain do not restrain wisely. They punish, but they do not punish in love. They are angry because their children have broken their rules; they punish in anger, and the punishment falls merely as the blow of a stronger person on a weaker. It does not humble, it does not soften. What awful consequences it often brings!

What skeletons it lodges in many a house! God has designed the family to be the nurse of what is best and purest in human life, and when this design is crossed then the family institution, which was designed to bring the purest joy, breeds the darkest misery. And this is one of the forms of retribution on wickedness which we see carried out in their fulness in the present life! How strange, that men should be in any doubt as to God carrying out the retribution of wickedness to the bitter end! How singular they should disbelieve in a hell! The end of many a career is written in these words:—"Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee; know therefore, and see that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that My fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts."

3. And now we go on to the meeting of Eli and Samuel. Samuel is in no haste to communicate to Eli the painful message he has received. He has not been required to do it, and he lies till the morning, awake we may believe, but staggered and dismayed. As usual he goes to open the doors of God's house. And then it is that Eli calls him. "What is the thing that He hath said unto thee?" he asks. He adjures Samuel to tell him all. And Samuel does tell him all. And Eli listens in silence, and when it is over he says, with meek resignation, "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good."

We are touched by this behaviour of Eli. First we are touched by his bearing toward Samuel. He knows that God has conferred an honour on Samuel which He has not bestowed on him, but young though Samuel is he feels no jealousy, he betrays no sign of wounded pride. It is not easy for God's servants to bear being

passed over in favour of others, in favour of younger men. A feeling of mortification is apt to steal on them, accompanied with some bitterness toward the object of God's preference. This venerable old man shows nothing of that feeling. He is not too proud to ask Samuel for a full account of God's message. He will not have him leave anything out, out of regard to his feelings. He must know the whole, however painful it may be. He has learned to reverence God's truth, and he cannot bear the idea of not knowing all. And Samuel, who did not wish to tell him anything, is now constrained to tell him the whole. "He told him every whit, and hid nothing from him." He did not shun to declare to him the whole counsel of God. Admirable example for all God's servants! How averse some men are to hear the truth! And how prone are we to try to soften what is disagreeable in our message to sinners—to take off the sharp edge, and sheathe it in generalities and possibilities. It is no real kindness. The kindest thing we can do is to declare God's doom on sin, and to assure men that any hopes they may cherish of His relenting to do as He has said are vain hopes—"When I begin," says God, "I will also make an end."

And we are touched further by Eli's resignation to God's will. The words of Samuel must have raised a deep agony in his spirit when he thought of the doom of his sons. Feeble though he was, there might have arisen in his heart a gust of fierce rebellion against that doom. But nothing of the kind took place. Eli was memorable for the passive virtues. He could bear much, though he could dare little. He could submit, but he could not fight. We find him here meekly recognizing the Divine will. God has a right to

do what He will with His own; and who am I that I should cry out against Him? He is the Supreme Disposer of all events; why should a worm like me stand in His way? He submits implicitly to God. "The thing formed must not say to Him that formed him, Why hast Thou formed me thus"? What God ordains must be right. It is a terrible blow to Eli, but he may understand the bearings of it better in another state. He bows to that Supreme Will which he has learned to trust and to honour above every force in the universe.

Yes, we are touched by Eli's meekness and submission. And yet, though Eli had in him the stuff that martyrs are often made of, his character was essentially feeble, and his influence was not wholesome. He wanted that resolute purpose which men like Daniel possessed. His will was too feeble to control his life. He was too apprehensive of immediate trouble, of present inconvenience and unpleasantness, to carry out firm principles of action against wickedness, even in his own family. He was a memorable instance of the soundness of the principle afterwards laid down by St. Paul: "If a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?" He greatly needed the exhortation which God gave to Joshua—"Be strong and of a good courage." It is true his infirmity was one of natural temperament. Men might say he could not help it. Neither can one overcome temperament altogether. But men of feeble temperament, especially when set over others, have great need to watch it, and ask God to strengthen them where they are weak. Divine grace has a wonderful power to make up the defects of nature. Timid, irresolute Peter was a different man after his fall.

Divine grace turned him into a rock after all. The coward who had shrunk from before a maiden got courage to defy a whole Sanhedrim. In the ministers of God's house the timid, crouching spirit is specially unseemly. They, at least, would need to rest on firm convictions, and to be governed by a resolute will. "Finally, brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

4. Samuel is now openly known to be the prophet of the Lord. "Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.' Little didst thou think, Hannah, some twenty years ago, that the child thou didst then ask of the Lord would ere long supersede the high priest who showed so little tact and judgment in interpreting the agitation of thy spirit! No, thou hast no feeling against the venerable old man; but thou canst not but wonder at the ups and downs of Providence; thou canst not but recall the words of thine own song, "He bringeth low, and lifteth up." And Samuel has not to fight his way to public recognition, or wait long till it come. "All Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord."

And by-and-bye other oracles came to him, by which all men might have known that he was the recognized channel of communication between God and the people. We shall see in our next chapter into what trouble the nation was brought by disregarding his prophetic office, and recklessly determining to drag the ark of God into the battlefield. Meanwhile we cannot but remark what a dangerous position, in a mere

human point of view, Samuel now occupied. The danger was that which a young man encounters when suddenly or early raised to the possession of high spiritual power. Samuel, though little more than a boy, was now virtually the chief man in Israel. Set so high, his natural danger was great. But God, who placed him there, sustained in him the spirit of humble dependence. After all he was but God's servant. Humble obedience was still his duty. And in this higher sphere his career was but a continuation of what had been described when it was said, "The child Samuel ministered to the Lord in Shiloh."

CHAPTER VI.

THE ARK OF GOD TAKEN BY THE PHILISTINES.

1 Samuel iv.

WE are liable to form an erroneous impression of the connection of Samuel with the transactions of this chapter, in consequence of a clause which ought to belong to the last chapter, being placed, in the Authorized Version, at the beginning of this. The clause "And the word of Samuel came to all Israel" belongs really to the preceding chapter. It denotes that Samuel was now over all Israel the recognized channel of communication between the people and God. But it does not denote that the war with the Philistines, of which mention is immediately made, was undertaken at Samuel's instance. In fact, the whole chapter is remarkable for the absence of Samuel's name. What is thus denoted seems to be that Samuel was not consulted either about the war or about the taking of the ark into the battle. Whatever he may have thought of the war, he would undoubtedly have been horrified at the proposal about the ark. That whole transaction must have seemed to him a piece of infatuation. Probably it was carried into effect in a kind of tumultuous frenzy. But there can be no reasonable doubt that whatever Samuel could have done to oppose it would have been done with the greatest eagerness.

The history is silent about the Philistines from the days of Samson. The last we have heard of them was the fearful tragedy at the death of that great Judge of Israel, when the house fell upon the lords and the people, and such a prodigious slaughter of their great men took place. From that calamity they seem now to have revived. They would naturally be desirous to revenge that unexampled catastrophe, and as Ebenezer and Aphek are situated in the land of Israel, it would seem that the Philistines were the aggressors. They had come up from the Philistine plain to the mountainous country of Israel, and no doubt had already sent many of the people to flight through whose farms they came. As the Israelites had no standing army, the troops that opposed the Philistines could be little better than an untrained horde. When they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines, and they slew of the army about four thousand men. In a moral point of view the defeat was strange; the Philistines had made the attack, and the Israelites were fighting for their homes and hearths; yet victory was given to the invaders, and in four thousand homes of Israel there was lamentation and woe.

But this was not really strange. Israel needed chastening, and the Philistines were God's instruments for that purpose. In particular, judgment was due to the sons of Eli; and the defeat inflicted by the Philistines, and the mistaken and superstitious notion which seized on the people that they would do well to take God's ark into the battle, were the means by which their punishment came. How often Providence seems to follow a retrograde course! And yet it is a forward course all the time, although from our point of view it seems backward; just as those planets which are

nearer the sun than the earth sometimes seem to us to reverse the direction of their movement; although if we were placed in the centre of the system we should see very plainly that they are moving steadily forward all the time.

Three things call for special notice in the main narrative of this chapter—1. The preparation for the battle; 2. The battle itself; and 3. The result when the news was carried to Shiloh.

1. The preparation for the battle was the sending for the ark of the Lord to Shiloh, so that Israel might fight under the immediate presence and protection of their God.

It seemed a brilliant idea. Whichever of the elders first suggested it, it caught at once, and was promptly acted on. There were two great objections to it, but if they were so much as entertained they certainly had no effect given them. The first was, that the elders had no legitimate control over the ark. The custody of it belonged to the priests and the Levites, and Eli was the high priest. If the rulers of the nation at any time desired to remove the ark (as David afterwards did when he placed it on Mount Zion), that could only be done after clear indications that the step was in accordance with the will of God, and with the full consent of the priests. There is no reason to suppose that any means were taken to find out whether its removal to the camp was in accordance with the will of God; and as to the mind of the priests, Eli was probably passed over as too old and too blind to be consulted, and Hophni and Phinehas would be restrained by no scruples from an act which every one seemed to approve. The second great objection to the step was that it was a superstitious and irreverent use of the

symbol of God's presence. Evidently the people ascribed to the symbol the glorious properties that belonged only to the reality. They expected that the symbol of God's presence would do for them all that might be done by His presence itself. And doubtless there had been occasions when the symbol and the reality went together. In the wilderness, in the days of Moses, "It came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered, and let them that hate Thee flee before Thee" Num. x. 35). But these were occasions determined by the cloud rising and going before the host, an unmistakable indication of the will of God (Num. ix. 15-22). God's real presence accompanied the ark on these occasions, and all that was expressed in the symbol was actually enjoyed by the people. There was no essential or inherent connection between the two; the actual connection was determined merely by the good pleasure of God. It pleased Him to connect them, and connected they were. But the ignorant and superstitious elders forgot that the connection between the symbol and the reality was of this nature; they believed it to be inherent and essential. In their unthinking and unreasoning minds the symbol might be relied on to produce all the effect of the reality. If only the ark of God were carried into the battle, the same effect would take place as when Moses said in the wilderness, "Rise up, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered."

Could anything show more clearly the unspiritual tendencies of the human mind in its conceptions of God, and of the kind of worship He should receive? The idea of God as the living God is strangely foreign to the human heart. To think of God as one who has

a will and purpose of His own, and who will never give His countenance to any undertaking that does not agree with that will and purpose, is very hard for the unspiritual man. To make the will of God the first consideration in any enterprise, so that it is not to be thought of if He do not approve, and is never to be despaired of if He be favourable, is a bondage and a trouble beyond his ability. Yet even superstitious men believe in a supernatural power. And they believe in the possibility of enlisting that power on their side. And the method they take is to ascribe the virtue of a charm to certain external objects with which that power is associated. The elders of Israel ascribed this virtue to the ark. They never inquired whether the enterprise was agreeable to the mind and will of God. They never asked whether in this case there was any ground for believing that the symbol and the reality would go together. They simply ascribed to the symbol the power of a talisman, and felt secure of victory under its shadow.

Would that we could think of this spirit as extinct even in Christian communities! What is the Romish and the very High Church doctrine of the sacraments but an ascription to them, when rightly used, of the power of a charm? The sacraments, as Scripture teaches, are symbols of very glorious realities, and wherever the symbols are used in accordance with God's will the realities are sure to be enjoyed. But it has long been the doctrine of the Church of Rome, and it is the doctrine of Churches, with similar views, that the sacraments are reservoirs of grace, and that to those who place no fatal obstacle in their way, grace comes from them *ex opere operato*, from the very act of receiving them. It is the Protestant and scriptural

doctrine that by stimulating faith, by encouraging us to look to the living Saviour, and draw from Him in whom all fulness dwells, the sacraments bring to us copious supplies of grace, but that without the presence of that living Saviour they would be merely as empty wells. The High Church view regards them as charms, that have a magic virtue to bless the soul. The superstitious mother thinks if only her child is baptised it will be saved, the act of baptism will do it, and she never thinks of the living Saviour and His glorious grace. The dying sinner thinks, if only he had the last sacraments, he would be borne peacefully and well through the dark scenes of death and judgment, and forgets that the commandment of Scripture is not, Look unto the last sacraments, but, "Look *unto Me* and be ye saved." Alas! what will men not substitute for personal dealings with the living God? The first book and the last book of the Bible present sad proof of his recoil from such contact. In Genesis, as man hears God's voice, he runs to hide himself among the trees of the garden. In Revelation, when the Judge appears, men call on the mountains to fall on them and hide them from Him that sitteth on the throne. Only when we see God's face, beautiful and loving, in Christ, can this aversion be overcome.

If the presence of the ark in the field of battle did much to excite the hopes of the Israelites, it did not less to raise the fears of their opponents. The shout with which its arrival was hailed by the one struck something of consternation into the breasts of the other. But now, an effect took place on which the Israelites had not reckoned. The Philistines were too wise a people to yield to panic. If the Hebrew God, that did such wonders in the wilderness, was present

with their opponents, there was all the more need for their bestirring themselves and quitting them like men. The elders of Israel had not reckoned on this wise plan. It teaches us, even from a heathen point of view, never to yield to panic. Even when everything looks desperate, there may be some untried resource to fall back on. And if this be a lesson to be learnt from pagans, much more surely may it be thought of by believers, who know that man's extremity is often God's opportunity, and that no peril is too imminent for God not to be able to deliver.

2. And now the battle rages. The hope of misguided Israel turns out an illusion. They find, to their consternation, that the symbol does not carry the reality. It pleases God to allow the ark with which His name is so intimately associated to be seized by the enemy. The Philistines carry everything before them. The ark is taken, Hophni and Phinehas are slain, and there fall of Israel thirty thousand footmen.

Can we fancy the feelings of the two priests who attended the ark as the defeat of the army of Israel became inevitable? The ark would probably be carried near the van of the army, preceded by some of the most valiant troops of Israel. No doubt it had been reckoned on that as soon as its sacred form was recognized by the Philistines, fear would seize on them, and they would fly before it. It must have made the two priests look grave when nothing of the kind took place, but the host of the Philistines advanced in firm and intrepid phalanx to the fight. But surely the first onset of the advanced guard will show with whose army the victory is to lie. The advanced guards are at close quarters, and the men of Israel give way. Was

there conscience enough left in these two men to flash into their minds that God, whose Holy Spirit they had vexed, was turned to be their enemy, and was now fighting against them? Did they, in that supreme moment, get one of those momentary glimpses, in which the whole iniquities of a lifetime seem marshalled before the soul, and the enormity of its guilt overwhelms it? Did they feel the anguish of men caught in their own iniquities, every hope perished, death inevitable, and after death the judgment? There is not one word, either in this chapter or in what precedes it, from which the slightest inference in their favour can be drawn. They died apparently as they had lived, in the very act of dishonouring God. With the weapons of rebellion in their hands, and the stains of guilt on their hearts, they were hurried into the presence of the Judge. Now comes the right estimate of their reckless, guilty life. All the arts of sophistry, all the refuges of lies, all their daring contempt of the very idea of a retribution on sin, are swept away in a moment. They are confronted with the awful reality of their doom. They see more vividly than even Eli or Samuel the truth of one part, certainly, of the Divine rule—"Them that honour Me I will honour; but they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed."

The time of guilty pleasure has passed for ever away; the time of endless retribution has begun. Oh, how short, how miserable, how abominable appears to them now the revelry of their evil life! what infatuation it was to forswear all the principles in which they had been reared, to laugh at the puritanic strictness of their father, to sit in the seat of the scorner, and pour contempt on the law of God's house! How they must have cursed the folly that led them into such awful

ways of sin, how sighed in vain that they had not in their youth chosen the better part, how wished they had never been born!

3. But we must leave the field of battle and hasten back to Shiloh. Since the ark was carried off Eli must have had a miserable time of it, reproaching himself for his weakness if he gave even a reluctant assent to the plan, and feeling that uncertainty of conscience which keeps one even from prayer, because it makes one doubtful if God will listen. Poor old man of ninety-eight years, he could but tremble for the ark! His official seat had been placed somewhere on the wayside, where he would be near to get tidings from the field of any one who might come with them, and quite probably a retinue of attendants was around him. At last a great shout of horror is heard, for a man of Benjamin has come in sight with his clothes rent and earth upon his head. It is but too certain a sign of calamity. But who could have thought of the extent of the calamity which with such awful precision he crowded into his answer? Israel is fled before the Philistines—calamity the first; there hath been a great slaughter among the people—calamity the second; thy two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are slain—calamity the third; and last, and most terrible of all, the ark of God is taken! The ark of God is taken! The Divine symbol, with its overshadowing cherubim and its sacred light, into which year by year Eli had gone alone to sprinkle the blood of atonement on the mercy-seat, and where he had solemnly transacted with God on behalf of the people, was in an enemy's hands! The ark, that no Canaanite or Amalekite had ever touched, on which no Midianite or Ammonite had ever laid his polluted finger, which had remained safe and sure in

Israel's custody through all the perils of their journeys and all the storms of battle, was now torn from their grasp! And there perishes with it all the hope of Israel, and all the sacred service which was associated with it; and Israel is a widowed, desolate, godless people, without hope and without God in the world; and all this has come because they dragged it away from its place, and these two sons of mine, now gone to their account, encouraged the profanation!

"And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died; for he was an old man and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years."

This was calamity the fifth; but even yet the list was not exhausted. "His daughter-in-law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, near to be delivered; and when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and travailed, for her pains came upon her. And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not, for thou hast born a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard it. And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel; because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father-in-law and her husband. And she said, The glory is departed from Israel; for the ark of God is taken."

Poor, good woman! with such a husband she had no doubt had a troubled life. The spring of her spirit had probably been broken long ago; and what little of elasticity yet remained was all too little to bear up under such an overwhelming load. But it may have been her comfort to live so near to the house of God

as she did, and to be thus reminded of Him who had commanded the sons of Aaron to bless the people saying, "The Lord bless thee and keep thee; the Lord make His face shine upon thee and be gracious to thee; the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace." But now the ark of God is taken, its services are at an end, and the blessing is gone. The tribes may come up to the feasts as before, but not with the bright eye or the merry shouts of former days; the bullock may smoke on the altar, but where is the sanctuary in which Jehovah dwelt, and where the mercy-seat for the priest to sprinkle the blood, and where the door by which he can come out to bless the people? Oh, my hapless child, what shall I call thee, who hast been ushered on this day of midnight gloom into a God-forsaken and dishonoured place? I will call thee Ichabod, for the glory is departed. The glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken.

What an awful impression these scenes convey to us of the overpowering desolation that comes to believing souls with the feeling that God has taken His departure. Tell us that the sun is no longer to shine; tell us that neither dew nor rain shall ever fall again to refresh the earth; tell us that a cruel and savage nation is to reign unchecked and unchallenged over all the families of a people once free and happy; you convey no such image of desolation as when you tell to pious hearts that God has departed from their community. Let us learn the obvious lesson, to do nothing to provoke such a calamity. It is only when resisted and dishonoured that the Spirit of God departs—only when He is driven away. Oh, beware of everything that grieves Him—everything that interferes with His gracious action on your souls.

Beware of all that would lead God to say, "I will go and return to My place, till they acknowledge their offence and seek My face." Let our prayer be the cry of David :—"Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free Spirit."

CHAPTER VII.

THE ARK AMONG THE PHILISTINES.

1 Samuel v., vi.

ALTHOUGH the history in Samuel is silent as to the doings of the Philistines immediately after their great victory over Israel, yet we learn from other parts of the Bible (Psalm lxxviii. 60-64; Jeremiah vii. 12, xxvi. 9) that they proceeded to Shiloh, massacred the priests, wrecked the city, and left it a monument of desolation, as it continued to be ever after. Probably this was considered an appropriate sequel to the capture of the ark—a fitting mode of completing and commemorating their victory over the national God of the Hebrews. For we may well believe that it was this unprecedented feature of their success that was uppermost in the Philistines' mind. The prevalent idea among the surrounding nations regarding the God of the Hebrews was that He was a God of exceeding power. The wonders done by Him in Egypt still filled the popular imagination (ch. vi. 6); the strong hand and the outstretched arm with which He had driven out the seven nations of Canaan and prepared the way for His people were not forgotten. Neither in more recent conflicts had any of the surrounding nations obtained the slightest advantage over Him. It was in His name that Barak and Deborah had de-

feated the Canaanites; it was the sword of the Lord and of Gideon that had thrown such consternation into the hearts of the Midianites. But now the tide was completely turned; not only had the Hebrew God failed to protect His people, but ruin had come on both Him and them, and His very sanctuary was in Philistine hands. No wonder the Philistines were marvellously elated Let us sweep from the face of the earth every trace and memorial of His worship, was their cry. Let us inflict such humiliation on the spot sacred to His name that never again shall His worshippers be able to regain their courage and lift up their heads, and neither we nor our children shall tremble any more at the mention of His terrible deeds.

We have not one word about Samuel in connection with all this. The news from the battlefield, followed by the death of Eli and of the wife of Phinehas, must have been a terrible blow to him. But besides being calm of nature (as his bearing showed after he got the message about Eli's house), he was habitually in fellowship with God, and in this habit enjoyed a great help towards self-possession and promptitude of action in sudden emergencies and perplexities. That the ill-advised scheme for carrying the ark into battle implied any real humiliation of the God of Israel, or would have any evil effect on the covenant sworn to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he could not for a moment suppose. But the confusion and trouble that would arise, especially if the Philistines advanced upon Shiloh, was a very serious consideration. There was much left at Shiloh which needed to be cared for. There were sacred vessels, and possibly national records, which must not be allowed to fall into the hands of the enemy. By what means Samuel was able to secure the safety of these;

by what means he secured his own personal safety when "the priests fell by the sword" (Psalm lxxviii. 64), we cannot say. But the Lord was with Samuel, and even in this hour of national horror He directed his proceedings, and established upon him the work of his hands.

The fact to which we have drawn attention, that it was over the God of Israel that the Philistines had triumphed, is the key to the transactions recorded so minutely in the fifth and sixth chapters. The great object of these chapters is to show how God undeceived the Philistines on this all-important point. He undeceived them in a very quiet, undemonstrative manner. On certain occasions God impresses men by His great agencies,—by fire and earthquake and tempest, by "stormy wind fulfilling His word." But these are not needed on this occasion. Agencies much less striking will do the work. God will recover His name and fame among the nations by much humbler forces. By the most trifling exertion of His power, these Philistines will be brought to their wit's end, and all the wisdom of their wisest men and all the craft of their most cunning priests will be needed to devise some propitiation for One who is infinitely too strong for them, and to prevent their country from being brought to ruin by the silent working of His resistless power.

1. First of all, the ark is carried to Ashdod, where stood the great temple of their God, Dagon. It is placed within the precincts of the temple, in some place of subordination, doubtless, to the place of the idol. Perhaps the expectation of the Philistines was that in the exercise of his supernatural might their god would bring about the mutilation or destruction of the Hebrew symbol. The morning showed another sight. It was

Dagon that was humiliated before the ark—fallen to the ground upon his face. Next day a worse humiliation had befallen him. Besides having fallen, his head and hands were severed from the image, and only the stump remained. And besides this, the people were suffering extensively from a painful disease, emerods or hemorrhoids, and this too was ascribed to the influence of the God of the Hebrews. The people of Ashdod had no desire to prolong the contest. They gathered the lords of the Philistines and asked what was to be done. The lords probably concluded that it was a case of mere local ill-luck. But what had happened at Ashdod would not happen elsewhere. Let the ark be carried to Gath.

2. To Gath, accordingly, the ark is brought. But no sooner is it there than the disease that had broken out at Ashdod falls upon the Gittites, and the mortality is terrible. The people of Gath are in too great haste to call again on the lords of the Philistines to say what is to be done. They simply carry the ark to Ekron.

3. And little welcome it gets from the Ekronites. It is now recognised as the symbol of an angry God, whose power to punish and to destroy is unlimited. The Ekronites are indignant at the people of Gath. "They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people." The destruction at Ekron seems to have been more awful than at the other places—"The cry of the city went up to heaven." The lords of the Philistines are again convened, to deliberate over the failure of their last advice. There is no use trying any other place in the country. The idea of local ill-luck is preposterous. Let it go again to its own place! is the cry. Alas that we have destroyed Shiloh, for where can we send it now? We can

risk no further mistakes. Let us convene the priests and the diviners to determine how it is to be got quit of, and with what gifts or offerings it is to be accompanied. Would only we had never touched it!

The priests and the diviners give a full answer on all the points submitted to them. First, the ark when sent away must contain an offering, in order to propitiate the Hebrew God for the insults heaped on Him. The offering was to be in the form of golden emerods and golden mice. It would appear that in addition to the disease that had broken out on the bodies of the people they had had in their fields the plague of mice. These field-mice bred with amazing rapidity, and sometimes consumed the whole produce of the field. There is a slight difficulty about numbers here. There are to be five golden emerods and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines (vi. 3); but it is said after (ver. 18) that the number of the golden mice was according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both of fenced cities and country villages. It is surmised, however, that (as in the Septuagint) the number *five* should not be repeated in the middle of the first passage (vi. 4, 5), but that it should run, "five golden emerods, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines, and golden mice, images of the mice that destroy the land." The idea of presenting offerings to the gods corresponding with the object in connection with which they were presented was often given effect to by heathen nations. "Those saved from shipwreck offered pictures of the shipwreck, or of the clothes which they had on at the time, in the Temple of Isis; slaves and captives, in gratitude for the recovery of their liberty, offered chains to the Lares;

retired gladiators, their arms to Hercules; and in the fifth century a custom prevailed among Christians of offering in their churches gold or silver hands, feet, eyes, etc., in return for cures effected in those members respectively in answer to prayer. This was probably a heathen custom transferred into the Christian Church; for a similar usage is still found among the heathen in India" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

4. Next, as to the manner in which the ark was to be sent away. A new cart was to be made, and two milch cows which had never been in harness before were to be fastened to the cart. This was to be out of respect to the God of Israel; new things were counted more honourable, as our Lord rode on a colt "whereon never man had yet sat," and His body was laid in a new sepulchre. The cows were to be left without guidance to determine their path; if they took the road to Judea, the road up the valley to Bethshemesh, that would be a token that all their trouble had come from the God of the Hebrews; but if they took any other road, the road to any place in the Philistine country, that would prove that there had only been a coincidence, and no relation of cause and effect between the capture of the ark and the evils that had befallen them. It was the principle of the lot applied to determine a grave moral question. It was a method which, in the absence of better light, men were ready enough to resort to in those times, and which on one memorable occasion was resorted to in the early Christian Church (Acts i.). The much fuller light which God has given men on moral and religious questions greatly restricts, if it does not indeed abolish, the lawful occasions of resorting to such a method. If it be ever lawful, it can only be so in the exercise of a devout and solemn spirit, for the apostles

did not make use of it by itself, but only after earnest prayer that God would make the lot the instrument of making known His will.

At last the ark leaves the land of the Philistines. For seven terrible months it had spread among them anxiety, terror, and death. Nothing but utter ruin seemed likely to spring from a longer residence of the ark in their territories. Glad were they to get rid of it, golden emerods, golden mice, new cart, milch kine, and all. We are reminded of a scene in Gospel history, that took place at Gadara after the devils drove the herd of swine over the cliff into the lake. The people of the place besought Jesus to depart out of their coasts. It is a solemn truth that there are aspects of God's character, aspects of the Saviour's character, in which He is only a terror and a trouble. These are the aspects in which God is seen opposed to what men love and prize, tearing their treasures away from them, or tearing them away from their treasures. It is an awful thing to know God in these aspects alone. Yet it is the aspect in which God usually appears to the sinner. It is the aspect in which our consciences present Him when we are conscious of having incurred His displeasure. And while man remains a sinner and in love with his sin, he may try to disguise the solemn fact to his own mind, but it is nevertheless true that his secret desire is to get rid of God. As the apostle puts it, he does not like to retain God in his knowledge (Rom. i. 28). He says to God, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways" (Job xxi. 14). Nay, he goes a step further—"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Ps. xiv. 1). Where he still makes some acknowledgment of Him, he may try to propitiate Him by offerings, and to make up for

the transgressions he commits in some things by acts of will-worship, or voluntary humiliation in other things. But alas! of how large a portion even of men in Christian lands is it true that they do not love God. Their hearts have no yearning for Him. The thought of Him is a disturbing, uncomfortable element. Heart communion with Him is a difficulty not to be overcome. Forms of worship that leave the heart unexercised are a great relief. Worship *performed* by choirs and instruments and æsthetic rules comes welcome as a substitute for the intercourse and homage of the soul. Could anything demonstrate more clearly the need of a great spiritual change? What but the vision of God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself can effect it? And even the glorious truths of redemption are not in themselves efficacious. The seed needs to fall on good soil. He that commanded the light to shine out of darkness must shine in our minds to give the light of the glory of God in the face of His Anointed. But surely it is a great step towards this change to feel the need of it. The heart that is honest with God, and that says, "O God Almighty, I do not love Thee, I am not happy in Thy presence, I like life better without Thee; but I am convinced that this is a most wretched condition, and most sinful. Wilt Thou, in infinite mercy, have compassion on me? Wilt Thou so change me that I may come to love Thee, to love Thy company, to welcome the thought of Thee, and to worship Thee in spirit and in truth?"—such a heart, expressing itself thus, will surely not be forsaken. How long it may be ere its quest is granted we cannot tell; but surely the day will come when the new song shall be put in its mouth—"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. Who forgiveth all thine

iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's."

5. And now the ark has reached Bethshemesh, in the tribe of Judah. The lords of the Philistines have followed it, watching it, as Miriam watched her infant brother on the Nile, to see what would become of it. Nor do they turn back till they have seen the men of Bethshemesh welcome it, till they have seen the Levites take it down from the cart, till they have seen the cart cleft, and the cows offered as a trespass offering, and till they have seen their own golden jewels, along with the burnt-offerings and sacrifices of the people of Bethshemesh, presented in due form to the Lord.

Thus far all goes well at Bethshemesh. The ark is on Hebrew soil. The people there have no fear either of the emerods or of the mice that so terribly distressed their Philistine neighbours. After a time of great depression the sun is beginning to smile on Israel again. The men of Bethshemesh are reaping their barley-harvest—that is one mercy from God. And here most unexpectedly appears the sight that of all possible sights was the most welcome to their eyes; here, unhurt and unrifled, is the ark of the covenant that had been given up for lost, despaired of probably, even by its most ardent friends. How could Israel hope to gain possession of that apparently insignificant box except by an invasion of the Philistines in overwhelming force—in such force as a nation that had but lately lost thirty thousand men was not able to command? And even if such an overwhelming expedition were to be arranged, how

easy would it not be for the Philistines to burn the ark, and thus annihilate the very thing to recover which the war was undertaken? Yet here is the ark back without the intervention of a single soldier. No ransom has been given for it, no blow struck, nothing promised, nothing threatened. Here it comes, as if unseen angels had fetched it, with its precious treasures and still more precious memories just as before! It was like a foreshadow of the return from the captivity —an experience that might have found expression in the words, "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream."

Happy men of Bethshemesh, for whom God prepared so delightful a surprise. Truly He is able to do in us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! Never let us despair of God, or of any cause with which He is identified. "Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him;" "The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought; He maketh the devices of the people of none effect. The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, and the thoughts of His heart to all generations."

But alas! the men of Bethshemesh did not act according to the benefit received. Their curiosity prevailed above their reverence: they looked into the ark of the Lord. As if the sacred vessel had not had enough of indignity in the din of battle, in the temples of the uncircumcised Philistines, and in the cart drawn by the kine, they must expose it to a yet further profanation! Alas for them! their curiosity prevailed over their reverence. And for this they had to pay a terrible penalty. "The Lord smote of the men of Bethshemesh fifty thousand and three score and ten

men." It is the general opinion, however, that an error has slipped into the text that makes the deaths amount to fifty thousand threescore and ten. Beth-shemesh was never more than a village or little town, and could not have had anything like so great a population. Probably the threescore and ten, without the fifty thousand, is all that was originally in the text. Even that would be "a great slaughter" in the population of a little town. It was a very sad thing that an event so joyous should be clouded by such a judgment. But how often are times and scenes which God has made very bright marred by the folly and recklessness of men!

The prying men of Bethshemesh have had their counterparts many a time in more recent days. Many men, with strong theological proclivities, have evinced a strong desire to pry into the "secret things which belong to the Lord our God." Foreknowledge, election, free will, sin's punishment—men have often forgot that there is much in such subjects that exceeds the capacity of the human mind, and that as God has shown reserve in what He has revealed about them, so men ought to show a holy modesty in their manner of treating them. And even in the handling of sacred things generally, in the way of theological discussion, a want of reverence has very often been shown. It becomes us all most carefully to beware of abusing the gracious condescension which God has shown in His revelation, and in the use which He designs us to make of it. It was an excellent rule a foreign theologian laid down for himself, to keep up the spirit of reverence —never to speak of God without speaking to God.

God has drawn very near to us in Christ, and given to all that accept of Him the place and privileges

of children. He allows us to come very near to Him in prayer. "In everything," He says, "by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving make your requests known unto God." But while we gratefully accept these privileges, and while in the enjoyment of them we become very intimate with God, never let us forget the infinite distance between us, and the infinite condescension manifested in His allowing us to enter into the holiest of all. Never let us forget that in His sight we are "as dust and ashes," unworthy to lift up our eyes to the place where His honour dwelleth. To combine reverence and intimacy in our dealings with God,—the profoundest reverence with the closest intimacy, is to realise the highest ideal of worship. God Himself would have us remember, in our approaches to Him, that He is in heaven and we on the earth. "Thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth Eternity and whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, but with him also who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the hearts of the contrite ones."

CHAPTER VIII.

REPENTANCE AND REVIVAL.

1 Samuel vii. 1-9.

WITH the men of Bethshemesh the presence of the ark had become the same terror as it had been successively at Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron. Instead of the savour of life to life, it had proved a savour of death to death. Instead of a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, it had become a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. They sent therefore to their neighbours at Kirjath-jearim, and begged them to come down and remove the ark. This they readily did. More timid men might have said, The ark has brought nothing but disaster in its train; we will have nothing to do with it. There was faith and loyalty to God shown in their readiness to give accommodation to it within their bounds. Deeming a high place to be the kind of situation where it should rest, they selected the house of Abinadab in the hill, he being probably a Levite. To keep the ark they set apart his son Eleazar, whose name seems to indicate that he was of the house of Aaron. They seem to have done all they could, and with due regard to the requirements of the law, for the custody of the sacred symbol. But Kirjath-jearim was not turned into the seat of the national worship. There is no word of sacrificial or other services being performed

there. There is nothing to indicate that the annual feasts were held at this place. The ark had a resting-place there—nothing more.

And this lasted for twenty years. It was a long and dreary time. A rude shock had been given to the sacred customs of the people, and the comely order of the Divine service among them. The ark and the other sacred vessels were separated from each other. If, as seems likely (1 Sam. xxi.), the daily offerings and other sacred services ordained by Moses were offered at this time at Nob, a sense of imperfection could not but belong to them, for the ark of the covenant was not there. Incompleteness would attach to any public rites that might now be celebrated. The service of Baal and Ashtaroth would have a less powerful rival than when the service of Jehovah was conducted in all due form and regularity at Shiloh. During these years the nation seems to have been somewhat listless on the subject, and to have made no effort to remove the ark to a more suitable place. Kirjath-jearim was not in the centre, but on the very edge of the country, looking down into the territory of the Philistines, not far from the very cities where the ark had been in captivity, a constant reminder to the Israelites of its degradation. That Samuel was profoundly concerned about all this we cannot doubt. But he seems to have made no effort to remedy it, most probably because he knew it to be God's order first to make the people sensible of their wickedness, and only thereafter to restore to them free access to Himself.

What then was Samuel doing during the twenty years that the ark was at Kirjath-jearim? We can answer that question only conjecturally, only from what we know of his general character. It cannot be doubted

that in some way or other he was trying to make the nation sensible of their sins against God; to show them that it was to these sins that their subjection to the Philistines was due; and to urge them to abandon their idolatrous practices if they desired a return to independence and peace. Perhaps he began at this period to move about from place to place, urging those views, as he moved about afterwards when he held the office of Judge (vii. 16). And perhaps he was laying the foundations of those schools of the prophets that afterwards were associated with his name. Whenever he found young men disposed to his views he would doubtless cultivate their acquaintance, and urge them to steadfastness and progress in the way of the Lord. There is nothing said to indicate that Samuel was connected with the priestly establishment at Nob.

There are two great services for God and for Israel in which we find Samuel engaged in the first nine verses of this chapter: 1. In exhorting and directing them with a view to bring them into a right state before God. 2. This being accomplished, in praying for them in their time of trouble, and obtaining Divine help when the Philistines drew near in battle.

1. In the course of time the people appear to have come to feel how sad and desolate their national life was without any tokens of God's presence and grace. "All the house of Israel lamented after the Lord." The expression is a peculiar one, and some critics, not understanding its spiritual import, have proposed to give it a different meaning. But for this there is no cause. It seems to denote that the people, missing God, under the severe oppression of the Philistines, had begun to grieve over the sins that had driven Him

away, and to long after Him, to long for His return. These symptoms of repentance, however, had not shown themselves in a very definite or practical form. Samuel was not satisfied with the amount of earnestness evinced as yet. He must have more decided evidence of sincerity and repentance. He insisted on it that they must "put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among them, and prepare their hearts unto the Lord and serve Him only."

Now the putting away of the strange gods and Ashtaroth was a harder condition than we at first should suppose. Some are inclined to fancy that it was a mere senseless and ridiculous obstinacy that drew the Israelites so much to the worship of the idolatrous gods of their neighbours. In reality the temptation was of a much more subtle kind. Their religious worship as prescribed by Moses had little to attract the natural feelings of the human heart. It was simple, it was severe, it was self-denying. The worship of the pagan nations was more lively and attractive. Fashionable entertainments and free-and-easy revelries were superadded to please the carnal mind. Between Hebrew and heathen worship, there was something of the contrast that you find between the severe simplicity of a Puritan meeting and the gorgeous and fashionable splendour of a great Romish ceremonial. To put away Baalim and Ashtaroth was to abjure what was fashionable and agreeable, and fall back on what was unattractive and sombre. Was it not, too, an illiberal demand? Was it not a sign of narrowness to be so exclusively devoted to their own religion that they could view that of their neighbours with no sort of pleasure? Why not acknowledge that in other religions there was an element of good, that the services in them

were the expression of a profound religious sentiment, and were therefore entitled to a measure of praise and approval? It is very certain that with this favourite view of modern liberalism neither Samuel nor any of the prophets had the slightest sympathy. No. If the people were in earnest now, they must show it by putting away every image and every object and ornament that was connected with the worship of other gods. Jehovah would have their homage on no other terms. If they chose to divide it between Him and other gods, they might call on them for help and blessing; for it was most certain that the God of Israel would receive no worship that was not rendered to Him alone.

But the people were in earnest; and this first demand of Samuel was complied with. We are to remember that the people of Israel, in their typical significance, stand for those who are by grace in covenant with God, and that their times of degeneracy represent, in the case of Christians, seasons of spiritual backsliding, when the things of this world are too keenly sought, when the fellowship of the world is habitually resorted to, when the soul loses its spiritual appetite, and religious services become formal and cold. Does there begin to dawn on such a soul a sense of spiritual poverty and loneliness? Does the spirit of the hymn begin to breathe from it—

> "Return, O holy Dove, return,
> Sweet Messenger of rest!
> I hate the sins that made Thee mourn
> And drove Thee from my breast."

Then the first steps towards revival and communion must be the forsaking of these sins, and of ways of

life that prepare the way for them. The sorrow for sin that is working in the conscience is the work of the Holy Ghost; and if the Holy Ghost be resisted in this His first operation—if the sins, or ways toward sin, against which He has given His warning be persisted in, the Spirit is grieved and His work is stopped. The Spirit calls us to set our hearts against these sins, and "prepare them unto the Lord."

Let us mark carefully this last expression. It is not enough that in church, or at some meeting, or in our closet, we experience a painful conviction how much we have offended God, and a desire not to offend Him in like manner any more. We must "prepare our hearts" for this end. We must remember that in the world with which we mingle we are exposed to many influences that remove God from our thoughts, that stimulate our infirmities, that give force to temptation, that lessen our power of resistance, that tend to draw us back into our old sins. One who has a tendency to intemperance may have a sincere conviction that his acts of drunkenness have displeased God, and a sincere wish never to be drunk again. But besides this he must "prepare his heart" against his sin. He must resolve to turn away from everything that leads to drinking, that gives strength to the temptation, that weakens his power of resistance, that draws him, as it were, within the vortex. He must fortify himself, by joining a society or otherwise, against the insidious approaches of the vice. And in regard to all that displeases God he must order his life so that it shall be abandoned, it shall be parted with for ever. You may say this is asking him to do more than he can do. No doubt it is. But is not the Holy Spirit working in him? Is it not the Holy Spirit that is urging him to

do these things? Whoever is urged by the Holy Spirit may surely rely on the power of the Spirit when he endeavours to comply with His suggestions. When God works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure, we may surely work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.

Having found the people so far obedient to his requirements, Samuel's next step was to call an assembly of all Israel to Mizpeh. He desired to unite all who were like-minded in a purpose of repentance and reformation, and to rouse them to a higher pitch of intensity by contact with a great multitude animated by the same spirit. When the assembly met, it was in a most proper spirit. They began the proceedings by drawing water and pouring it out before the Lord, and by fasting. These two acts being joined in the narrative, it is probable they were acts of the same character. Now as fasting was evidently an expression of contrition, so the pouring out of the water must have been so too. It is necessary to remark this, because an expression not unlike to our text, in Isa. xii., denotes an act of a joyful character, "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." But what was done on this occasion was to draw water and *pour it out before the Lord.* And this seems to have been done as a symbol of pouring out before God confessions of sin drawn from the depths of the heart. What they said in connection with these acts was, "We have sinned against the Lord." They were no longer in the mood in which the Psalmist was when he kept silence, and his bones waxed old through his roaring all the day. They were in the mood into which he came when he said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." They humbled them-

selves before God in deep convictions of their unworthiness, and being thus emptied of self they were in a better state to receive the gracious visitation of love and mercy.

It is important to mark the stress which is laid here on the *public assembly* of the people. Some might say would it not have answered the same end if the people had humbled themselves apart—the family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart, every family apart, and their wives apart, as in the great mourning of Zechariah (Zech. xii. 12-14)? We answer, the one way did not exclude the other; we do not need to ask which is best, for both are best. But when Samuel convened the people to a public assembly, he evidently did it on the principle on which in the New Testament we are required not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. It is in order that the presence of people like-minded, and with the same earnest feelings and purposes, may have a rousing and warming influence upon us. No doubt there are other purposes connected with public worship. We need constant instruction and constant reminding of the will of God. But the public assembly and the social prayer-meeting are intended to have another effect. They are intended to increase our spiritual earnestness by the sight and presence of so many persons in earnest. Alas! what a difference there often is between the ideal and the real. Those cold and passionless meetings that our churches and halls often present—how little are they fitted, by the earnestness and warmth of their tone, to give those who attend them a great impulse heavenward! Never let us be satisfied with our public religious services until they are manifestly adapted to this great end.

Thus did Samuel seek to promote repentance and revival among his people, and to prepare the way for a return of God's favour. And it is in this very way that if we would have a revival of earnest religion, we must set about obtaining it.

2. The next scene in the panorama of the text is—the Philistines invading Israel. Here Samuel's service is that of an intercessor, praying for his people, and obtaining God's blessing. It is to be observed that the alleged occasion for this event is said to have been the meeting held at Mizpeh. "When the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel." Was not this most strange and distressing? The blessed assembly which Samuel had convened only gives occasion for a new Philistine invasion! Trying to do his people good, Samuel would appear only to have done them harm. With the assembly at Mizpeh, called as it was for spiritual ends, the Philistines could have no real cause for complaint. Either they mistook its purpose and thought it a meeting to devise measures to throw off their yoke, or they had an instinctive apprehension that the spirit which the people of Israel were now showing would be accompanied by some remarkable interposition on their behalf. It is not rare for steps taken with the best of intentions to become for a time the occasion of a great increase of evil,—just as the remonstrances of Moses with Pharaoh led at first to the increase of the people's burdens; or just as the coming of Christ into the world caused the massacre of the babes of Bethlehem. So here, the first public step taken by Samuel for the people's welfare was the occasion of an alarming invasion by their cruel enemies. But God's word on

such occasions is, "Be still and know that I am God." Such events are suffered only to stimulate faith and patience. They are not so very overwhelming events to those who know that God is with them, and that "none of them that trust in Him shall be desolate." Though the Israelites at this time were not far advanced in spiritual life, they betrayed no consternation when they heard of the invasion of the Philistines. They knew where their help was to be found, and recognizing Samuel as their mediator, they said to him, "Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines."

With this request Samuel most readily complies. But first he offers a sucking lamb as a whole burnt-offering to the Lord, and only after this are we told that "Samuel cried unto the Lord, and the Lord heard him."

The lesson is supremely important. When sinners approach God to entreat His favour, it must be by the new and living way, sprinkled with atoning blood. All other ways of access will fail. How often has this been exemplified in the history of the Church! How many anxious sinners have sought unto God by other ways, but have been driven back, sometimes farther from Him than before. Luther humbles himself in the dust and implores God's favour, and struggles with might and main to reform his heart; but Luther cannot find peace until he sees how it is in the righteousness of another he is to draw nigh and find the blessing,—in the righteousness of the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. Dr. Chalmers, profoundly impressed with the sinfulness of his past life, strives, with the energy of a giant, to attain conformity to the will of God; but he too is only tossed about in weary

disappointment until he finds rest in the atoning mercy of God in Christ. We may be well assured that no sense of peace can come into the guilty soul till it accepts Jesus Christ as its Saviour in all the fulness of His saving power.

Another lesson comes to us from Samuel's intercession. It is well to try to get God's servants to pray for us. But little real progress can be made till we can pray for ourselves. Whoever really desires to enjoy God's favour, be it for the first time after he has come to the sense of his sins; or be it at other times, after God's face has been hid from him for a time through his backsliding, can never come as he ought to come without earnest prayer. For prayer is the great medium that God has appointed to us for communion with Himself. "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you." If there be any lesson written with a sunbeam alike in the Old Testament and in the New, it is that God is the Hearer of prayer. Only let us take heed to the quality and tone of our prayer. Before God can listen to it, it must be from the heart. To gabble over a form of prayer is not to pray. Saul of Tarsus had said many a prayer before his conversion; but after that for the first time it was said of him, "Behold, he prayeth." To pray is to ask an interview with God, and when we are alone with Him, to unburden our souls to Him. Those only who have learned to pray thus in secret can pray to any purpose in the public assembly. It is in this spirit, surely, that the highest gifts of Divine grace are to be sought. Emphatically it is in this way that we are to pray for our nation or for our Church. Let us come with large and glowing hearts when we come to pray for a whole community. Let us plead with God

for Church and for nation in the very spirit of the prophet: "For Zion's sake I will not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth."

CHAPTER IX.

NATIONAL DELIVERANCE—THE PHILISTINES SUBDUED.

1 Samuel vii. 10-17.

IT must have been with feelings very different from those of their last encounter, when the ark of God was carried into the battle, that the host of Israel now faced the Philistine army near Mizpeh. Then they had only the symbol of God's gracious presence, now they had the reality. Then their spiritual guides were the wicked Hophni and Phinehas; now their guide was holy Samuel. Then they had rushed into the fight in thoughtless unconcern about their sins; now they had confessed them, and through the blood of sprinkling they had obtained a sense of forgiveness. Then they were puffed up by a vain presumption; now they were animated by a calm but confident hope. Then their advance was hallowed by no prayer; now the cry of needy children had gone up from God's faithful servant. In fact, the battle with the Philistines had already been fought by Samuel on his knees. There can be no more sure token of success than this. Are we engaged in conflict with our own besetting sins? Or are we contending against scandalous transgression in the world around us? Let us first fight the battle on our knees. If we are victorious there we need have little fear of victory in the other battle.

It was as Samuel was offering up the burnt-offering that the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. There was an unseen ladder that day between earth and heaven, on which the angels of God ascended and descended as in Jacob's vision at Bethel. The smoke of the burnt-offering carried up to God the confession and contrition of the people, their reliance on God's method of atonement, and their prayer for His pardon and His blessing. The great thunder with which God thundered on the Philistines carried down from God the answer and the needed help. There is no need for supposing that the thunder was supernatural. It was an instance of what is so common, a natural force adapted to the purpose of an answer to prayer. What seems to have occurred is this: a vehement thunderstorm had gathered a little to the east, and now broke, probably with violent wind, in the faces of the Philistines, who were advancing up the heights against Mizpeh. Unable to face such a terrific war of the elements, the Philistines would turn round, placing their backs to the storm. The men of Israel, but little embarrassed by it, since it came from behind them, and gave the greater momentum to their force, rushed on the embarrassed enemy, and drove them before them like smoke before the wind. It was just as in former days—God arose, and His enemies were scattered, and they also that hated Him fled before Him. The storm before which the Philistines cowered was like the pillar of fire which had guided Israel through the desert. Jehovah was still the God of Israel; the God of Jacob was once more his refuge.

We have said that this thunderstorm may have been quite a natural phenomenon. Natural, but not casual. Though natural, it was God's answer to Samuel's

prayer. But how could this have been? If it was a natural storm, if it was the result of natural law, of atmospheric conditions the operation of which was fixed and certain, it must have taken place whether Samuel prayed or not. Undoubtedly. But the very fact that the laws of nature are fixed and certain, that their operation is definite and regular, enables the great Lord of Providence to make use of them in the natural course of things, for the purpose of answering prayer. For this fact, the uniformity of natural law, enables the Almighty, who sees and plans the end from the beginning, to frame a comprehensive scheme of Providence, that shall not only work out the final result in His time and way, but that shall also work out every intermediate result precisely as He designs and desires. "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world." Now if God has so adjusted the scheme of Providence that the final result of the whole shall wonderfully accomplish His grand design, may He not, must He not, have so adjusted it that every intermediate part shall work out some intermediate design? It is only those who have an unworthy conception of omniscience and omnipotence that can doubt this. Surely if there is a general Providence, there must be a special Providence. If God guides the whole, He must also guide the parts. Every part of the scheme must fall out according to His plan, and may thus be the means of fulfilling some of His promises.

Let us apply this view to the matter of prayer. All true prayer is the fruit of the Holy Spirit working in the human soul. All the prayer that God answers is prayer that God has inspired. The prayer of Samuel was prayer which God had inspired. What more

reasonable than that in the great plan of providence there should have been included a provision for the fulfilment of Samuel's prayer at the appropriate moment? The thunderstorm, we may be sure, was a natural phenomenon. But its occurrence at the time was part of that great scheme of Providence which God planned at the beginning, and it was planned to fall out then in order that it might serve as an answer to Samuel's prayer. It was thus an answer to prayer brought about by natural causes. The only thing miraculous about it was its forming a part of that most marvellous scheme—the scheme of Divine providence —a part of the scheme that was to be carried into effect after Samuel had prayed. If the term supernatural may be fitly applied to that scheme which is the sum and substance of all the laws of nature, of all the providence of God, and of all the works and thoughts of man, then it was a miracle; but if not, it was a natural effect.

It is important to bear these truths in mind, because many have the impression that prayer for outward results cannot be answered without a miracle, and that it is unreasonable to suppose that such a multitude of miracles as prayer involves would be wrought every day. If a sick man prays for health, is the answer necessarily a miracle? No; for the answer may come about by purely natural causes. He has been directed to a skilful physician; he has used the right medicine; he has been treated in the way to give full scope to the recuperative power of nature. God, who led him to pray, foresaw the prayer, and in the original scheme of Providence planned that by natural causes the answer should come. We do not deny that prayer may be answered in a supernatural way. We would

not affirm that such a thing as supernatural healing is unknown. But it is most useful that the idea should be entertained that such prayer is usually answered by natural means. By not attending to this men often fail to perceive that prayer has been answered. You pray, before you set out on a journey, for protection and safe arrival at the end. You get what you asked—you perform the journey in safety. But perhaps you say, "It would have been all the same whether I had prayed for it or not. I have gone on journeys that I forgot to pray about, and no evil befel me. Some of my fellow-passengers, I am sure, did not pray for safety, yet they were taken care of as much as I was." But these are sophistical arguments. You should feel that your safety in the journey about which you prayed was as much due to God, though only through the operation of natural causes, as if you had had a hairbreadth escape. You should be thankful that in cases where you did not pray for safety God had regard to the habitual set of your mind, your habitual trust in Him, though you did not specially exercise it at these times. Let the means be as natural as they may—to those who have eyes to see the finger of God is in them all the same.

But to return to the Israelites and the Philistines. The defeat of the Philistines was a very thorough one. Not only did they make no attempt to rally after the storm had passed and Israel had fallen on them, but they came no more into the coast of Israel, and the hand of the Lord was against them all the days of Samuel. And besides this, all the cities and tracts of land belonging to Israel which the Philistines had taken were now restored. Another mercy that came to Israel was that "there was peace between Israel

and the Amorites"—the Amorites being put here, most likely, for the remains of all the original inhabitants living among or around Israel. Those promises were now fulfilled in which God had said to Moses, "This day will I begin to put the dread of thee and the fear of thee upon the nations that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear report of thee, and shall tremble and be in anguish because of thee" (Deut. ii. 25). "There shall no man be able to stand before you; for the Lord your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land ye shall tread upon, as He hath said to thee." It was so apparent that God was among them, and that the power of God was irresistible and overwhelming, that their enemies were frightened to assail them.

The impression thus made on the enemies of Israel corresponds in some degree to the moral influence which God-fearing men sometimes have on an otherwise godless community. The picture in the Song of Solomon—"Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and *terrible as an army with banners?*"—ascribes even to the fair young bride a terrifying power, a power not appropriate to such a picture in the literal sense, but quite suitable in the figurative. Wherever the life and character of a godly man is such as to recall God, wherever God's image is plainly visible, wherever the results of God's presence are plainly seen, there the idea of a supernatural Power is conveyed, and a certain overawing influence is felt. In the great awakening at Northampton in Jonathan Edwards' days, there was a complete arrest laid on open forms of vice. And whensoever in a community God's presence has been powerfully realized, the taverns have been emptied, the

gambling-table deserted, under the sense of His august majesty. Would only that the character and life of all God's servants were so truly godlike that their very presence in a community would have a subduing and restraining influence on the wicked!

Two points yet remain to be noticed: the step taken by Samuel to commemorate this wonderful Divine interposition; and the account given of the prophet and his occupations in his capacity of Judge of Israel.

"Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

The position of Shen is not known. But it must have been very near the scene of the defeat of the Philistines—perhaps it was the very spot where that defeat occurred. In that case, Samuel's stone would stand midway between the two scenes of battle: the battle gained by him on his knees at Mizpeh, and the battle gained by the Israelites when they fell on the Philistines demoralised by the thunderstorm.

"Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." The characteristic feature of the nscription lies in the word "hitherto." It was no doubt a testimony to special help obtained in that time of trouble; it was a grateful recognition of that help; and it was an enduring monument to perpetuate the memory of it. But it was more, much more. The word "hitherto" denotes a series, a chain of similar mercies, an unbroken succession of Divine interpositions and Divine deliverances. The special purpose of this inscription was to link on the present deliverance to all the past, and to form a testimony to the enduring faithfulness and mercy of a covenant-keeping God. But was there not something strange in this inscription, considering the

circumstances? Could Samuel have forgot that tragic day at Shiloh—the bewildered, terrified look of the messenger that came from the army to bring the news, the consternation caused by his message, the ghastly horror of Eli and his tragic death, the touching death of the wife of Phinehas, and the sad name which she had with such seeming propriety given to her babe? Was *that* like God remembering them? or had Samuel forgot how the victorious Philistines soon after dashed upon Shiloh like beasts of prey, plundering, destroying, massacreing, till nothing more remained to be done to justify the name of "Ichabod"? How can Samuel blot that chapter out of the history? or how can he say, with that chapter fresh in his recollection, "*Hitherto* hath the Lord helped us"?

All that Samuel has considered well. Even amid the desolations of Shiloh the Lord was helping them. He was helping them to know themselves, helping them to know their sins, and helping them to know the bitter fruit and woful punishment of sin. He was helping them to achieve the great end for which he had called them—to keep alive the knowledge of the true God and the practice of His worship, onward to the time when the great promise should be realised, —when HE should come in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed. Samuel's idea of what constituted the nation's glory was large and spiritual. The true glory of the nation was to fulfil the function for which God had taken it into covenant with Himself. Whatever helped them to do this was a blessing, was a token of the Lord's remembrance of them. The links of the long chain denoted by Samuel's "hitherto" were not all of one kind. Some were in the form of mercies, many were in the form of chastenings. For the higher

the function for which Israel was called, the more need was there of chastening. The higher the destination of a silver vessel, the greater is the need that the silver be pure, and therefore that it be frequently passed through the furnace. The destination of Israel was the highest that could have been. So Samuel does not merely give thanks for seasons of prosperity, but for checks and chastenings too.

Happy they who, full of faith in the faithfulness and love of God, can take a similar view of His dealings! Happy they who, when special mercies come, deem the occasion worthy to be commemorated by some special memorial, but who can embrace their whole life in the grateful commemoration, and bracket joys and sorrows alike under their "hitherto"! It is not that sorrows are less sorrows to them than to others; it is not that losses of substance entail less inconvenience, or bereavements penetrate less deeply; but that all are seen to be embraced in that gracious plan of which the final consummation is, as the apostle puts it, "to present her to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing." And well is it for us, both in individual life and in Church and national life, to think of that plan of God in which mercies and chastenings are united, but all with a gracious purpose! It is remarkable how often in Scripture tears are wiped away with this thought. Zion saying, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me," is assured, "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands, thy walls are continually before Me." Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted, is thus addressed, "Refrain thy voice from weeping and thine eyes from tears; for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord, and thy children

shall come again from the land of the enemy." "Weep not," said our Lord to the woman of Nain; and His first words after His resurrection were, "Woman, why weepest thou?" Vale of tears though this world is, there comes from above a gracious influence to wipe them away; and the march Zionward has in it something of the tread and air of a triumphant procession, for "the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy on their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

We have yet to notice the concluding verses of the chapter (15-17), which give a little picture of the public life of Samuel. He judged Israel all the days of his life. The office of judge had a twofold sphere, external and internal. Externally, it bore on the oppression of the people by foreign enemies, and the judge became the deliverer of the people. But in this sense there was now nothing for Samuel to do, especially after the accession of Saul to the kingdom. The judge seems to have likewise had to do with the administration of justice, and the preservation of the peace and general welfare of the nation. It is very natural to suppose that Samuel would be profoundly concerned to imbue the people with just views of the purpose for which God had called them, and of the law and covenant which He had given them. The three places among which he is said to have made his circuit, Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpeh, were not far from each other, all being situated in the tribes of Benjamin and Judah,—in that part of the land which afterwards constituted the kingdom of the two tribes. To these three places falls to be added Ramah, also in the same neighbourhood, where was his house. In this place he built an altar to the Lord

Whether this was in connection with the tabernacle or not, we cannot say. We know that in the time of David's wanderings "the house of God" was at Nob (Compare 1 Sam. xxi. 1 and Matt. xii. 4), but we have nothing to show us when it was carried thither. All we can say is, that Samuel's altar must have been a visible memorial of the worship of God, and a solemn protest against any idolatrous rites to which any of the people might at any time be attracted.

In this way Samuel spent his life like Him whose type he was, "always about his Father's business." An unselfish man, having no interests of his own, full of zeal for the service of God and the public welfare; possibly too little at home, taking too little charge of his children, and thus at last in the painful position of one, "whose sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment" (ch. viii. 1). That Samuel attained the highest reputation for sanctity, intercourse with God and holy influence, is plain from various passages of Scripture. In Psalm xcix. 6, he is coupled with Moses and Aaron, as having influence with God,—"they called upon the Lord and He answered them." In Jeremiah xv. 1, his name is coupled with that of Moses alone as a powerful intercessor, "Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind could not be toward this people." His mother's act of consecration was wonderfully fulfilled. Samuel stands out as one of the best and purest of the Hebrew worthies. His name became a perpetual symbol of all that was upright, pure and Godlike. The silent influence of his character was a great power in Israel, inspiring many a young heart with holy awe, and silencing the flippant arrogance of the scoffer. Mothers, did not Hannah do well, do

nobly, in dedicating her son to the Lord? Sons and daughters, was it not a noble and honourable life? Then go ye and do likewise. And God be pleased to incline many a heart to the service; a service, which with all its drawbacks, is the highest and the noblest; and which bequeaths so blessed a welcome into the next stage of existence: "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord"

CHAPTER X.

THE PEOPLE DEMAND A KING.

1 Samuel viii.

WHATEVER impression the "Ebenezer" of Samuel may have produced at the time, it passed away with the lapse of years. The feeling that, in sympathy with Samuel, had recognized so cordially at that time the unbroken help of Jehovah from the very beginning, waxed old and vanished away. The help of Jehovah was no longer regarded as the palladium of the nation. A new generation had risen up that had only heard from their fathers of the deliverance from the Philistines, and what men only hear from their fathers does not make the same impression as what they see with their own eyes. The privilege of having God for their king ceased to be felt, when the occasions passed away that made His interposition so pressing and so precious. Other things began to press upon them, other cravings began to be felt, that the theocracy did not meet. This double process went on—the evils from which God did deliver becoming more faint, and the benefits which God did not bestow becoming more conspicuous by their absence—till a climax was reached. Samuel was getting old, and his sons were not like himself; therefore they afforded no materials for continuing the system of judges. None

of them could ever fill their father's place. The people forgot that God's policy had been to raise up judges from time to time as they were needed. But would it not be better to discontinue this hand-to-mouth system of government and have a regular succession of kings? Why should Israel contrast disadvantageously in this respect with the surrounding nations? This seems to have been the unanimous feeling of the nation. "All the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and said to Samuel, Make us a king to judge us like all the nations."

It seems to us very strange that they should have done such a thing. Why were they not satisfied with having God for their king? Was not the roll of past achievements under His guidance very glorious? What could have been more wonderful than the deliverance from Egypt, and the triumph over the greatest empire in the world? Had ever such victories been heard of as those over Sihon and Og? Was there ever a more triumphant campaign than that of Joshua, or a more comfortable settlement than that of the tribes? And if Canaanites, and Midianites, and Ammonites, and Philistines had vexed them, were not Barak and Deborah, Gideon and Jephthah, Samson and Samuel, more than a match for the strongest of them all? Then there was the moral glory of the theocracy. What nation had ever received direct from God, such ordinances, such a covenant, such promises? Where else were men to be found that had held such close fellowship with heaven as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and Aaron, and Joshua? What other people had had such revelations of the fatherly character of God, so that it could be said of them, "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her

wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord did lead him, and there was no strange god with him." Instead of wishing to change the theocracy, we might have expected that every Israelite, capable of appreciating solid benefits, would have clung to it as his greatest privilege and his greatest honour.

But it was otherwise. Comparatively blind to its glories, they wished to be like other nations. It is too much a characteristic of our human nature that it is indifferent to God, and to the advantages which are conferred by His approval and His blessing. How utterly do some leave God out of their calculations! How absolutely unconcerned they are as to whether they can reckon on His approval of their mode of life, how little it seems to count! You that by false pretences sell your wares and prey upon the simple and unwary; you that heed not what disappointment or what pain and misery you inflict on those who believe you, provided you get their money; you that grow rich on the toil of underpaid women and children, whose life is turned to slavery to fulfil your hard demands, do you never think of God? Do you never take into your reckoning that He is against you, and that He will one day come to reckon with you? You that frequent the haunts of secret wickedness, you that help to send others to the devil, you that say, "Am I my brother's keeper?" when you are doing your utmost to confirm others in debauchery and pollution, is it nothing to you that you have to reckon one day with an angry God? Be assured that God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap; for he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, while he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

But the lesson of the text is rather for those who have the favour and blessing of God, but are not content, and still crave worldly things. You are in covenant with God. He has redeemed you, not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. You are now sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what you shall be. There is laid up for you an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Yet your heart hankers after the things of the world. Your acquaintances and friends are better off. Your bare house, your homely furnishings, your poor dress, your simple fare distress you, and you would fain be in a higher worldly sphere, enjoying more consideration, and participating more freely in worldly enjoyments. Be assured, my friends, you are not in a wholesome frame of mind. To be depreciating the surpassing gifts which God has given you, and to be exaggerating those which He has withheld, is far from being a wholesome condition. You wish to be like the nations. You forget that your very glory is not to be like them. Your glory is that ye are a chosen generation, an holy nation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar people, your bodies temples of the Holy Ghost, your souls united to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet again, there are congregations, which though in humble circumstances, have enjoyed much spiritual blessing. Their songs have gone up, bearing the incense of much love and gratitude; their prayers have been humble and hearty, most real and true; and the Gospel has come to them not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance. Yet a generation has grown up that thinks little of these inestimable blessings, and misses fine architecture,

and elaborate music, and highly cultured services. They want to have a king like the nations. However they may endanger the spiritual blessing, it is all-important to have these surroundings. It is a perilous position, all the more perhaps that many do not see the peril—that many have little or no regard for the high interests that are in such danger of being sacrificed.

This then, was the request of all the elders of Israel to Samuel—"Give us a king to judge us like all the nations." We have next to consider how it was received by the prophet.

"The thing displeased Samuel." On the very face of it, it was an affront to himself. It intimated dissatisfaction with the arrangement which had made him judge of the people under God. Evidently they were tired of him. He had given them the best energies of his youth and of his manhood. He had undoubtedly conferred on them many real benefits. For all this, his reward is to be turned off in his old age. They wish to get rid of him, and of his manner of instructing them in the ways of the Lord. And the kind of functionary they wish to get in his room is not of a very flattering order. The kings of the nations for the most part were a poor set of men. Despotic, cruel, vindictive, proud—they were not much to be admired. Yet Israel's eyes are turned enviously to them! Possibly Samuel was failing more than he was aware of, for old men are slow to recognise the progress of decay, and highly sensitive when it is bluntly intimated to them. Besides this, there was another sore point which the elders touched roughly. "Thy sons walk not in thy ways." However this may have come about, it was a sad thought to their father. But fathers often have the feeling that while they may reprove their sons, they do

not like to hear this done by others. Thus it was that the message of the elders came home to Samuel, first of all, in its personal bearings, and greatly hurt him. It was a personal affront, it was hard to bear. The whole business of his life seemed frustrated; everything he had tried to do had failed; his whole life had missed its aim. No wonder if Samuel was greatly troubled.

But in the exercise of that admirable habit which he had learned so thoroughly, Samuel took the matter straight to the Lord. And even if no articulate response had been made to his prayer, the effect of this could not but have been great and important. The very act of going into God's presence was fitted to change, in some measure, Samuel's estimate of the situation. It placed him at a new point of view—at God's point of view. When he reached that, the aspect of things must have undergone a change. The bearing of the transaction on God must have come out more prominently than its bearing on Samuel. And this was fully expressed in God's words. "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me." Samuel was but the servant, God was the lord and king. The servant was not greater than his lord, nor the disciple greater than his Master. The great sin of the people was their sin against God. He it was to whom the affront had been given; He, if any, it was that had cause to remonstrate and complain.

So prone are even the best of God's servants to put themselves before their Master. So prone are ministers of the Gospel, when any of their flock has acted badly, to think of the annoyance to themselves, rather than the sin committed in the holy eyes of God. So prone are we all, in our families, and in our Churches, and in society, to think of other aspects of sin, than its

essential demerit in God's sight. Yet surely this should be the first consideration. That God should be dishonoured is surely a far more serious thing than that man should be offended. The sin against God is infinitely more heinous than the sin against man. He that has sinned against God has incurred a fearful penalty—what if this should lie on his conscience for ever, unconfessed, unforgiven? It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Yet, notwithstanding this very serious aspect of the people's offence, God instructs Samuel to "hearken to their voice, yet protest solemnly to them, and show them the manner of the kingdom." There were good reasons why God should take this course. The people had shown themselves unworthy the high privilege of having God for their king. When men show themselves incapable of appreciating a high privilege, it is meet they should suffer the loss of it, or at least a diminution of it. They had shown a perpetual tendency to those idolatrous ways by which God was most grievously dishonoured. A theocracy, to work successfully, would need a very loyal people. Had Israel only been loyal, had it even been a point of conscience and a point of honour with them to obey God's voice, had they even had a holy recoil from every act offensive to Him, the theocracy would have worked most beautifully. But there had been such a habitual absence of this spirit, that God now suffered them to institute a form of government that interposed a human official between Him and them, and that subjected them likewise to many an inconvenience. Yet even in allowing this arrangement God did not utterly withdraw His loving-kindness from them. The theocracy did not wholly cease. Though they would find that their kings

would make many an exaction of them, there would be among them some that would reign in righteousness, and princes that would rule in judgment. The king would so far be approved of God as to bear the name of "the Lord's anointed:" and would thus, in a sense, be a type of the great Anointed One, the true Messiah, whose kingdom, righteous, beneficent, holy, would be an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion from generation to generation.

The next scene in the chapter before us finds Samuel again met with the heads of the people. He is now showing them "the manner of the king"—the relation in which he and they will stand to one another. He is not to be a king that gives, but a king that takes. His exactions will be very multifarious. First of all, the most sacred treasures of their homes, their sons and their daughters, would be taken to do hard work in his army, and on his farms, and in his house. Then, their landed property would be taken on some pretext —the vineyards and olive-yards inherited from their fathers—and given to his favourites. The tenth part of the produce, too, of what remained would be claimed by him for his officers and his servants, and the tenth of their flocks. Any servant, or young man, or animal, that was particularly handsome and valuable would be sure to take his fancy, and to be attached for his service. This would be ordinarily the manner of their king. And the oppression and vexation connected with this system of arbitrary spoliation would be so great that they would cry out against him, as indeed they did in the days of Rehoboam, yet the Lord would not hear them. Such was Samuel's picture of what they desired so much, but it made no impression; the people were still determined to have their king.

What a contrast there was between this exacting king, and the true King, the King that in the fulness of the time was to come to His people, meek and having salvation, riding upon the foal of an ass! If there be anything more than another that makes this King glorious, it is His giving nature. "The Son of God," says the Apostle, "loved me, and gave Himself for me." Gave Himself! How comprehensive the word! All that He was as God, all that He became as man. As prophet He gave Himself to teach, as priest to atone and intercede, as king to rule and to defend. "The Good Shepherd *giveth* His life for the sheep." "This is My body which is *given* for you." "If thou knewest the gift of God, and Who it is that saith unto thee, Give Me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have *given* thee living water." With what kingly generosity, while He was on earth, He scattered the gifts of health and happiness among the stricken and the helpless! "Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people." See Him, even as He hung helpless on the cross, exercising His royal prerogative by giving to the thief at His side a right to the Kingdom of God—"Verily I say unto thee, this day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." See Him likewise, exalted on His throne "at God's right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." How different the attributes of this King from him whom Samuel delineated! The one exacting all that is ours; the other giving all that is His!

The last scene in the chapter shows us the people deliberately disregarding the protest of Samuel, and

reiterating their wilful resolution—"Nay, but we will have a king over us; that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles." Once more, Samuel brings the matter to the Lord—repeats all that he has heard; and once more the Lord says to Samuel, "Hearken unto their choice and make them a king." The matter is now decided on, and it only remains to find the person who is to wear the crown.

On the very surface of the narrative we see how much the people were influenced by the desire to be "like all the nations." This does not indicate a very exalted tone of feeling. To be like all the nations was surely in itself a poor and childish thing, unless the nations were in this respect in a better condition than Israel. Yet how common and almost irresistible is this feeling!

Singularity is certainly not to be affected for singularity's sake; but neither are we to conform to fashion simply because it is fashion. How cruel and horrible often are its behests! The Chinese girl has to submit to her feet being bandaged and confined till walking becomes a living torture, and even the hours of what should be rest and sleep, are often broken by bitter pain. The women of Lake Nyassa insert a piece of stone in their upper lip, enlarging it from time to time till speaking and eating become most awkward and painful operations, and the very lip sometimes is torn away. Our fathers had terrible experience of the tyranny of the drinking customs of their day; and spite of the greater freedom and the greater temperance of our time, there is no little tyranny still in the drinking laws of many a class among us. All this is just the outcome of the spirit that made the Hebrews so desire

a king—the shrinking of men's hearts from being unlike others, the desire to be like the world. What men dread in such cases is not wrong-doing, not sin, not offending God; but incurring the reproof of men, being laughed at, boycotted by their fellows. But is not this a very unworthy course? Can any man truly respect himself who says, "I do this not because I think it right, not even because I deem it for my interest, but simply because it is done by the generality of people?" Can any man justify himself before God, if the honest utterance of his heart must be, "I take this course, not because I deem it well-pleasing in Thy sight, but because if I did otherwise, men would laugh at me and despise me?" The very statement of the case in explicit terms condemns it. Not less is it condemned by the noble conduct of those to whom grace has been given to withstand the voice of the multitude and stand up faithfully for truth and duty. Was there ever a nobler attitude than that of Caleb, when he withstood the clamour of the other spies, and followed the Lord fully? or that of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, when alone among myriads, they refused to bow down to the image of gold? or that of Luther when, alone against the world, he held unflinchingly by his convictions of truth?

Let the young especially ponder these things. To them it often seems a terrible thing to resist the general voice, and hold by conscience and duty. To confess Christ among a school of despisers, is often like martyrdom. But think! What is it to *deny* Christ? Can that bring any peace or satisfaction to those who know His worth? Must it not bring misery and self-contempt? If the duty of confessing Him be difficult, seek strength for the duty. Pray for the strength

which is made perfect in your weakness. Cast your thoughts onward to the day of Christ's second coming, when the opinion and practice of the world shall all be reduced to their essential worthlessness, and the promises to the faithful, firm as the everlasting hills, shall be gloriously fulfilled. For in that day, Hannah's song shall have a new fulfilment: "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar out of the dunghill, to set them among princes, and make them inherit the throne of glory."

CHAPTER XI.

SAUL BROUGHT TO SAMUEL.

1 Samuel ix. 1—14.

GOD'S providence is a wonderful scheme; a web of many threads, woven with marvellous skill; a network composed of all kinds of materials, great and small, but so arranged that the very smallest of them is as essential as the largest to the completeness of the fabric.

One would suppose that many of the dramas of the Old Testament were planned on very purpose to show how intimately things secular and things sacred, as we call them, are connected together; how entirely the minutest events are controlled by God, and at the same time how thoroughly the freedom of man is preserved. The meeting of two convicts in an Egyptian prison is a vital link in the chain of events that makes Joseph governor of Egypt; a young lady coming to bathe in the river preserves the life of Moses, and secures the escape of the Israelites; the thoughtful regard of a father for the comfort of his sons in the army brings David into contact with Goliath, and prepares the way for his elevation to the throne; the beauty of a Hebrew girl fascinating a Persian king saves the whole Hebrew race from massacre and extermination.

So in the passage now before us. The straying of

some asses from the pastures of a Hebrew farmer brings together the two men, of whom the one was the old ruler, and the other was to be the new ruler of Israel. That these two should meet, and that the older of them should have the opportunity of instructing and influencing the younger, was of the greatest consequence for the future welfare of the nation. And the meeting is brought about in that casual way that at first sight seems to indicate that all things happen without plan or purpose. Yet we find, on more careful examination, that every event has been planned to fit in to every other, as carefully as the pieces of a dissected map, or the fragments of a fine mosaic. But of all the actors in the drama, not one ever feels that his freedom is in any way interfered with. All of them are at perfect liberty to follow the course that commends itself to their own minds.

Thus wonderfully do the two things go together—Divine ordination and human freedom. How it should be so, it baffles us to explain. But that it is so, must be obvious to every thoughtful mind. And it is because we see the two things so harmonious in the common affairs of life, that we can believe them to act harmoniously in the higher plane of redemption and salvation. For in that sphere, too, all things fall out in accordance with the Divine plan. "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world." Yet this universal predestination in no degree interferes with the liberty of man. If men reject God's offers, it is because they are personally unwilling to accept of them. If they receive His offers, it is because they have been made willing to do so. "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life," said our Lord to the Jews. And yet it is ever true that "it is God

that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

God having given the people permission to appoint a king, that king has now to be found. What kind of person must the first king be—the first to supersede the old rule of the Divinely-inspired judges, the first to fulfil the cravings of the people, the first to guide the nation which had been appointed by God to stand in so close a relation to Himself?

It seemed desirable, that in the first king of Israel, two classes of qualities should be united, in some degree contradictory to one another. First, he must possess some of the qualities for which the people desire to have a king; while at the same time, from God's point of view, it is desirable that under him the people should have some taste of the evils which Samuel had said would follow from their choice.

To an Oriental people, a stately and commanding personality was essential to an ideal king. They liked a king that would look well on great occasions, that would be a commanding figure at the head of an army, or in the centre of a procession; that would arrest the eye of strangers, and inspire at first sight an involuntary respect for the nation that had such a ruler at its head. Nor could any one have more fully realized the wishes of the people in this respect than Saul. "A choice young man and a goodly; there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he; from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people."

Further, though his tribe was small in number, it was not small in influence. And his family was of a superior caste, for Kish was "a mighty man of power." And Saul's personal qualities were prepossessing and

promising. He showed himself ready to comply with his father's order about the asses that had strayed, and to undertake a laborious journey to look for them. He was interested in his father's business, and ready to help him in his time of need. And the business which he undertook he seems to have executed with great patience and thoroughness. A foot journey over a great part of the territory of Benjamin was no easy task. Altogether, he shows himself, as we say, a capable man. He is not afraid to face the irksome; he does not consult merely for his ease and pleasure; labour does not distress him, and difficulties do not daunt him.

All this was so far promising, and it seems to have been exactly what the people desired. But on the other hand, there seems to have been, from the very beginning, a great want in Saul. He appears from the very first to have wanted all that was most conspicuous and most valuable in Samuel. It is a circumstance not without its significance, that the very name and work of Samuel do not seem to have been familiar or even known to him. It was his servant that knew about Samuel, and that told Saul of his being in the city, in the land of Zuph (ver. 6). This cannot but strike us as very strange. We should have thought that the name of Samuel would have been as familiar to all the people of Israel as that of Queen Victoria to the people of Great Britain. But Saul does not appear to have heard it, as in any way remarkable. Does not this indicate a family living entirely outside of all religious connections, entirely immersed in secular things, caring nothing about godly people, and hardly ever even pronouncing their name? It is singular how utterly ignorant worldly men are of what passes in religious

circles, if they happen to have no near relative, or familiar acquaintance in the religious world to carry the news to them from time to time. And as Saul thus lived outside of all religious circles, so he seems to have been entirely wanting in that great quality which was needed for a king of Israel—loyalty to the Heavenly King. Here it was that the difference between him and Samuel was so great. Loyalty to God and to God's nation was the very foundation of Samuel's life. Anything like self-seeking was unknown to him. He had early undergone that momentous change, when God is substituted for self as the pivot of one's life. The claims of the great King were ever paramount in his eyes. What would please God and be honouring to Him, was the first question that rose to his mind. And as Israel was God's people, so the interest and the welfare of Israel were ever dear to him. And thus it was that Samuel might be relied on not to think of himself, not to think of his own wishes or interests, except as utterly subordinate to the wishes and interests of his God and his nation. It was this that gave such solidity to Samuel's character, and made him so invaluable to his people. In every sphere of life it is a precious quality. Whether as domestic servants, or clerks, or managers, dependent on others, those persons are ever of priceless worth whose hearts are thus set on objects outside themselves, and who are proof against the common temptations of selfishness and worldliness. And when they are the rulers of a nation, and are able to disregard their personal welfare in their burning desire to benefit the whole people, they rise to the rank of heroes, and after their death, their names are enshrined in the memories of a grateful and admiring people.

But in these high qualities, Saul seems to have been altogether wanting. For though he was not selfish and self-indulgent at first, though he readily obeyed his father in going to search for the strayed asses, he had no deep root of unselfishness in his nature, and by-and-bye, in the hour of temptation, the cloven foot unhappily appeared. And ere long the people would learn, that as Saul had in him no profound reverence for the will of God, so he had in him no profound and indefeasible regard for the welfare of God's people. The people would come to see what a fatal mistake they had made in selecting a king merely for superficial qualities, and passing by all that would have allied him, as Samuel was allied, to God himself. Now it seems to have been God's purpose that the first king of Israel should be a man of this kind. Through him the people were to learn that the king who simply fulfilled their notions, was capable, when his self-will was developed, of dragging the nation to ruin. No! it was not the superficial qualities of Saul that would be a blessing to the nation. It was not a man out of all spiritual sympathy with the living God that would raise the standing of Israel among the kingdoms around, and bring them the submission and respect of foreign kings. The intense and consistent godliness of Samuel was probably the quality that was not popular among the people. In the worldliness of his spirit, Saul was probably more to their liking. Yet it was this unworldly but godly Samuel that had delivered them from the bitter yoke of the Philistines, and it was this handsome but unspiritual Saul that was to bring them again into bondage to their ancient foes. This was the sad lesson to be learned from the reign of Saul.

But God did not design altogether to abandon His

people. When the lesson should be learnt from Saul's history, He would guide them to a king of a different stamp. He would give them a king after His own heart—one that would make the will of God the great rule, and the welfare of the people the great end of his government. David would engrave in the history of the nation in deeper letters than even Samuel, the all-important lesson, that for kings and countries as much as for individuals, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" that God honours them that honour Him, while they that despise Him shall indeed be lightly esteemed.

But let us now come to the circumstances that led to the meeting of Saul and Samuel. The asses of Kish had strayed. Very probably they had strayed at a time when they were specially needed. The operations of the farm had to be suspended for want of them, perhaps at a season when any delay would be especially inconvenient. In all ranks of life, men are subject to these vexations, and he is a happy man who does not fret under them, but keeps his temper calm, in spite of all the worry. Especially is he a happy man who retains his equanimity under the conviction that the thing is appointed by God, and that He who overruled the loss of Kish's asses to such high events in the history of his son, is able so to order all their troubles and worries that they shall be found conducive to their highest good. At Kish's order, Saul and one of the servants go forth to seek the asses. With the precise localities through which they passed, we are not accurately acquainted, such places as Shalim or Zuph not having yet been identified. But the tour must have been an extensive one, extending over most of the territory of Benjamin; and as it must have been neces-

sary to make many a detour, up hill and down dale, to this farm and to that, the labour involved must have been very great. It was not a superficial but a thorough search.

At last, when they came to the land of Zuph, they had been away so long that Saul thought it necessary to return, lest his father should think that some evil had befallen them. But the servant had another string to his bow. Though Saul was not familiar with the name or the character of Samuel, his servant was. What God hides from the wise and prudent, He sometimes reveals to babes. It is an interesting thing in the history of the Church, how often great people have been indebted to servants for important guidance, perhaps even for their first acquaintance with saving truth. The little captive maid that ministered in the house of Naaman the Syrian was the channel through whom he came to know of the prophet of Israel who was able to heal him. Many a distinguished Christian has acknowledged, like the Earl of Shaftesbury, his obligations to some pious nurse that when he was a child told him Bible stories and pressed on his heart the claims of God. Happy those servants who are faithful in these circumstances, and of whom it can be said, "They have done what they could!" Of this servant of Saul's we know nothing whatever, save that, in his master's dilemma, he told him of the Lord's servant, and induced him to apply to him to extricate him from his difficulty.

It does not appear that the city was Samuel's usual place of abode. It was a place to which he had come to hold a religious service, and the occasion was evidently one of much importance. It is interesting to observe how the difficulty was got over, of their having

no present to offer to the man of God, in accordance with the custom of the country. Saul, though in comfortable circumstances, had absolutely no particle of money with him. His servant had but a quarter of a shekel, not designed apparently for spending purposes, but perhaps a little keepsake or kind of amulet he carried about with him. But there was such hospitality in those days that people going about the country had no need for money. So it was when our Lord instructed the disciples when sending them out on their missionary tour—"Provide neither gold nor silver nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves, for the labourer is worthy of his meat." Those who have presumed on these instructions, holding that the modern missionary does not need any sustenance to be provided for him, but may safely trust to the hospitality of the heathen, forget how different was the case and the custom among the Hebrew people.

But now, as Saul and his servant came to the city, another providential meeting takes place to help them to their object. "As they went up the hill to the city, they found young maidens going out to draw water." The city was up the hill, and the water supply would naturally be at the bottom. From the maidens that were going down to the fountain, they obtained information fitted to quicken their movements. They learned that the prophet had already arrived. The preparations for the sacrifice which he was to offer were now going on. It was just the time to get a word with him, if they had business to transact. Very soon he would be going up to the high place, and then the solemn rites would begin, and be followed by the feast, which would engross his whole attention. If they would catch him

at the proper moment they must "make haste." That they did quicken their pace, we cannot doubt. And it was necessary; for just as they reached the city Samuel made his appearance, about to go up to the high place. If they had lost that moment, they would probably have had no opportunity during the whole day. Nor is it likely that Saul, who had no great desire for the company of the prophet, would have waited till the sacrifice and the feast were over. The two men were brought together just in the nick of time. And thus another essential link of God's chain, bringing the old and the new ruler of Israel into contact with each other, was happily adjusted, all through means to us apparently accidental, but forming parts of the great scheme of God.

From this part of the narrative we may derive two great lessons, the one with reference to God, and the other with reference to man.

First, as it regards God, we cannot but see how silently, secretly, often slowly, yet surely, He accomplishes His purposes. There are certain rivers in nature that flow so gently, that when looking at the water only, the eye of the spectator is unable to discern any movement at all. Often the ways of God resemble such rivers. Looking at what is going on in common life, it is so ordinary, so absolutely quiet, that you can see no trace whatever of any Divine plan. Things seem left to themselves, and God appears to have no connection with them. And yet, all the while, the most insignificant of them is contributing towards the accomplishment of the mighty plans of God. By means of ten thousand times ten thousand agents, conscious and unconscious, things are moving on towards the grand consummation. Men may be instruments in God's

hands without knowing it. When Cyrus was moving his armies towards Babylon, he little knew that he was accomplishing the Divine purpose for the humbling of the oppressor and the deliverance of His oppressed people. And in all the events of common life, men seem to be so completely their own masters, there seems such a want of any influence from without, that God is liable to slip entirely out of sight. And yet, as we see from the chapter before us, God is really at work. Whether men know it or not, they are really fulfilling the purposes of His will. Calmly but steadily, like the stars in the silent heavens, men are bringing to pass the schemes of God. His wildest enemies are really helping to swell His triumphs. Oh, how vain is the attempt to resist His mighty hand! The day cometh, when all the tokens of confusion and defeat shall disappear, when the bearing even of the fall of a sparrow on the plans of God shall be made apparent, and every intelligent creature in earth and heaven shall join in the mighty shout—"Alleluiah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth."

But again, there is a useful lesson in this chapter for directing the conduct of men. You see in what direction the mind of Saul's servant moved for guidance in the day of difficulty. It was toward the servant of God. And you see likewise how, when Saul and he had determined to consult the man of God, they were providentially guided to him. To us, the way is open to God Himself, without the intervention of any prophet. Let us in every time of trouble seek access to God. Have we not a thousand examples of it in Bible history, and in other history too? Men say it is not right we should trouble God with trifles. Nay, the living God knows not what trouble is, and in His scheme

there are no trifles. There is no limit one way or other in the command, "*In everything* by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." "Acknowledge Him in *all* your ways, and He will direct your steps." But above all, acknowledge Him with reference to the way of life eternal. Make sure that you are in the way to heaven. Use well the guide book with which you are furnished. Let God's word be a light to your feet and a lamp to your path; and then your path shall itself "be like the shining light, shining brighter and brighter unto the perfect day."

CHAPTER XII.

FIRST MEETING OF SAMUEL AND SAUL.

1 Samuel ix. 15-27.

THE meeting between Samuel and Saul was preceded by previous meetings between Samuel and God. God had prepared the prophet for his visit from the future king of Israel, and the first thing brought before us in these verses is the communication on this subject which had been made to the prophet a day before.

It is very interesting to observe how readily Samuel still lends himself for any service he can render on behalf of his people, under the new arrangement that God had permitted for their government. We have seen how mortified Samuel was at first, when the people came to him with their request for a king. He took it as a personal affront, as well as a grave public error. Conscious as he was of having done his duty faithfully, and of having rendered high service to the nation, and reposing calmly, as he probably was, on the expectation that at least for some time to come, Israel would move forward peacefully and happily on the lines which he had drawn for them, it must have been a staggering blow when they came to him and asked him to overturn all that he had done, and make them a king. It must have been one of those bewildering

moments when one's whole life appears lost, and all one's dearest hopes and hardest labours lie shattered, like the fragments of a potter's vessel. We have seen how, in that sad moment, Samuel carried his sorrows to the Lord, and learning thus to view the whole matter from God's point of view, how he came to make comparatively little account of his own disappointment, and to think only how he could still serve the cause of God, how he could still help the people, how he could prevent the vessel which he was no longer to steer from dashing against the hidden rocks he saw so clearly ahead. It is impossible not to be struck with the beauty and purity of Samuel's character in this mode of action.

How many a good man takes offence when slighted or superseded by some committee or other body, in connection with a political, social, or religious cause which he has tried to help! If they won't have me, he says, let them do without me. If they won't allow me to carry out the course which I have followed, and which has been undoubtedly highly beneficial, I'll have nothing more to do with them. He sulks in his tent like Achilles, or goes over to the enemy like Coriolanus. Not so Samuel! His love for the people is too deep to allow of such a course. They have behaved badly to him, but notwithstanding he will not leave them. Like an injured but loving wife, who labours with every art of patient affection to reclaim the husband that has abused her and broken her heart; like a long-suffering father, who attends with his own hands to the neglected work of his dissipated son, to save him if possible from the consequences of his folly—Samuel overlooks his personal slight, and bears with the public folly of the people, in the endeavour to be of some use to them in

the important stage of their history on which they are entering. He receives Divine communications respecting the man who is to supersede him in the government of the people, and instead of jealousy and dislike, shows every readiness to help him. It is refreshing to find such tokens of magnanimity and disinterestedness. However paltry human nature may be in itself, it can become very noble when rehabilitated by the Spirit of God. Need we ask which is the nobler course? You feel that you have not been treated perhaps by your church with sufficient consideration. You fret, you complain, you stay away from church, you pour your grievance into every open ear. Would Samuel have done so? Is not your conduct the very reverse of his? Side by side with his, must not yours be pronounced poor and paltry? Have you not need to study the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, and when you read of the charity that "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things," ask yourselves whether it might not be said of you that you have neither part nor lot in this matter?

The communication that God had made to Samuel was, that on the following day He would send to him the man whom he was to anoint as captain over Israel, that he might save them from the Philistines; for He had looked upon His people, because their cry was come up to Him. There is an apparent inconsistency here with what is said elsewhere. In chap. viii. 13 it is said, that "the Philistines came no more into the coast of Israel, and that the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel." But probably "all the days of Samuel" mean only the days when he exerted himself actively against them. As

long as Samuel watched and checked them, they were kept in restraint; but when he ceased to do so, they resumed their active hostility. The concluding verses of chap. xiii. (19-23) show that in Saul's time the Philistine oppression had become so galling that the very smiths had been removed from the land of Israel, and there was no right provision even for sharpening ploughshares, or coulters, or axes, or mattocks. Undoubtedly Saul removed this oppression for a time, and David's elegy shows how beneficial his reign was in some other ways, although the last act of his life was an encounter with the Philistines in which he was utterly defeated. It is evident that before Saul's time the tyranny of their foes had been very galling to the Israelites. The words of God, "their cry is come up to Me," indicate quietly a very terrible state of distress. They carry us back to the words uttered at the burning bush, "I have seen, I have seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows." God speaks after the manner of men. He needs no cry to come into His ears to tell Him of the woes of the oppressed. Nevertheless He seems to wait till that cry is raised, till the appeal is made to Him, till the consciousness of utter helplessness sends men to His footstool. And a very blessed truth it is, that He sympathizes with the cry of the oppressed. There is much meaning in the simple expression—"their cry is come up to Me." It denotes a very tender sympathy, a concern for all that they have been suffering, and a resolution to interpose on their behalf. God is never impassive nor indifferent to the sorrows and sufferings of His people. All are designed to serve as chastenings with a view to ultimate good. The eye of God is ever watching to see whether

the chastening is sufficient, and when it is so, to stop the suffering. In the Inquisitor's chamber, the eye of God was ever on the boot and the thumbscrew, on the knife and the pincers, on the furnace and all the other instruments of torture. In the sick room, He watches the spent and struggling patient, knows every paroxysm of pain, knows all the restlessness and tossing of the weary night. He understands the anguish of the loving heart when one after another of its treasures is torn away. He knows the unutterable distress when a child's misconduct brings down grey heirs with sorrow to the grave. Appearances may be all the other way, but "the Lord God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and of great compassion." The night may be long and weary, but the dawn comes at the appointed time. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy."

But now Samuel and Saul have met. Saul is as unfamiliar with Samuel's appearance as with his name; he goes up to him and asks where the seer's house is. "I am the seer," replies Samuel; but at the moment Samuel was not at liberty, and could not converse with Saul. He invites him to go up with him to the high place, and take part in the religious service. Then he invites him to the feast that was to follow the sacrifice. Next day he is to deal with him as a prophet, making important communications to him. But in regard to the matter which occupies him at the moment, his father's asses, he need trouble himself no more on that head, for the asses are found. Then he gives Saul a hint of what is coming. He makes an announcement to him that he and his father's house are the objects of the whole desire of Israel. It is not very apparent

whether or not Saul had any inkling of the meaning of this remark. It may be that he viewed it as a mere expression of politeness, savouring of the customary exaggeration of the East. At all events, his answer was couched in those terms of extravagant humility which was likewise matter of Eastern custom. "Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Wherefore then speakest thou so to me?"

The sacrifice next engages the attention of all. Samuel's first meeting with Saul takes place over the symbol of expiation, over the sacrifice that shows man to be a sinner, and declares that without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. No doubt the circumstance was very impressive to Samuel, and would be turned to its proper use in subsequent conversation with Saul, whether Saul entered into the spirit of it or not. If it be asked, How could a sacrifice take place on the height of this city, whereas God had commanded that only in the place which He was to choose should such rites be performed?—the answer is, that at that time Shiloh lay in ruins, and Mount Zion was still in the possession of the Jebusites. The final arrangements had not yet been made for the Hebrew ceremonial, and in the present provisional and unsettled state of things, sacrifices were not limited to a single place.

After the sacrifice, came the feast. It was now that Samuel began to give more explicit hints to Saul of the dignity to which he was to be raised. The feast was held in "the parlour"— a room adjacent to the place of sacrifice, to which Samuel had invited a large company—thirty of the chief inhabitants of the town.

First Saul and his servant are complimented by having the place of honour assigned to them. Then they are honoured by having a portion set before them which had been specially set apart for them the day before. The speech concerning this portion in ver. 24 is somewhat obscure if it be regarded as a speech of Samuel's. It seems more natural to regard it as a speech of the cook's. It will be observed that the word "Samuel" in the middle of the verse is in italics, showing that it is not in the Hebrew, so that it is more natural to regard the clause as having "the cook" for its nominative, and indeed this talk about the portion is more suitable for the cook than for Samuel. Servants were not forbidden to speak during entertainments; nor did their masters disdain even to have serious conversation with them (see Nehemiah ii. 2-8). There is another correction of the Authorized Version that needs to be made. At the end of ver. 24 the words "Since I said" are not a literal rendering. The original is simply the word which is constantly rendered *saying*. It has been suggested ("Speaker's Commentary") that a word or two should be supplied to make the sense complete, and the verse would then run:—"unto this time hath it been kept for thee [against the festival of which Samuel spake], saying, I have invited the people." The part thus reserved was the shoulder and its appurtenances. Why this part was regarded as more honourable than any other, we do not know, nor is it of any moment; the point of importance being, first, that by Samuel's express instructions it had been reserved for Saul, and second, that these instructions had been given as soon as Samuel made arrangements for the feast. To honour Saul as the destined king of Israel was Samuel's unhesitating purpose. Some

men might have said, It will be time enough to show this mark of respect when the man is actually chosen king. Had there been the slightest feeling of grudge in the mind of Samuel, this is what he would have thought. But instead of grudging Saul his new dignity, he is forward to acknowledge it. There shall be no holding back on his part of honour for the man whom the Lord delighted to honour.

If the words of ver. 24 were really spoken by the cook, they must have added a new element of surprise and impression to Saul. It was apparent that he had been expected to this feast. The cook had been warned that a man of consequence was coming, and had therefore set apart that portion to him. Saul must have felt both that a supernatural power had been at work, and that some strange destiny—possibly the royal dignity—was in reserve for him. To us, pondering the circumstances, what is most striking is, the wonderful way in which the fixed purpose of God is accomplished, while all the agents in the matter remain perfectly free. That Saul and his servant should be present with Samuel at that feast, was the fixed decree of heaven. But it was brought about quite naturally. There was no constraint on the mind of Saul's servant, when, being in the land of Zuph, he proposed that they should go into the city, and try to make inquiry of the man of God. There was no constraint on the damsels when at a certain time they went down to the fountain for water, and on their way met Saul and his servant. There was no constraint on Saul and his servant, save that created by common sense, when they quickened their pace in order to meet Samuel on the way to the sacrifice. Every one of these events fell out freely and naturally. Yet all were necessary links

in the chain of God's purposes. From God's point of view they were necessary, from man's point of view they were casual. Thus necessity and freedom harmonized together, as they always do in the plans and operations of God. It is absurd to say that the predestination of God takes away the liberty of man. It is unreasonable to suppose that because God has predestinated all events, we need not take any step in the matter of our salvation. Such an idea is founded on an utter misunderstanding of the relation in which God has placed us to Him. It overlooks the great truth, that God's ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts. The relation of the Infinite Will to the wills of finite creatures is a mystery we cannot fathom; but the effect on us should be to impel us to seek that our will may ever be in harmony with God's, and that thus the petition in the Lord's prayer may be fulfilled, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."

The feast is over; Samuel and Saul return to the city, and there, on the housetop, they commune together. The twenty-sixth verse seems to narrate in detail what is summarily contained in the twenty-fifth. After returning from the sacrifice and the feast, they seem to have committed themselves to rest. In the early morning, about daybreak, they had their conversation on the housetop, and thereafter Samuel sent Saul away, convoying him part of the road. What the conversation on the housetop was, we are not told; but we have no difficulty in conjecturing. Samuel could not but communicate to Saul the treasured thoughts of his lifetime regarding the way to govern Israel. He must have recalled to him God's purpose regarding His people, beginning with the call of Abraham, dwelling

on the deliverance from Egypt, and touching on the history of the several judges, and the lessons to be derived from each. We may fancy the fervour with which he would urge on Saul, that the one thing most essential for the prosperity of the nation—the one thing which those in power ought continually to watch and aim at, was, loyalty by the people to their heavenly King, and the faithful observance of His law and covenant. He would dwell emphatically on the many instances in which neglect of the covenant had brought disaster and misery, and on the wonderful change in their outward circumstances which had come with every return of fidelity to their King. Granted, they were soon to have a king. They were to change their form of government, and be like the rest of the nations. But if they changed their form of government, they were not to surrender the palladium of their nation, they were not to abandon their "gloria et tutamen." The new king would be tempted like all the kings around him to regard his own will as his only rule of action, and to fall in with the prevalent notion, that kings were above the law, because the king's will was the law, and nothing could be higher than that. What an infinite calamity it would be to himself and to the nation, if the new king of Israel were to fall into such a delusion! Yes, the king *was* above the law, and the king's will *was* the law; but it was the King of kings alone who had this prerogative, and woe to the earthly ruler that dared to climb into His throne, and take into his puny hands the sceptre of the Omnipotent!

Such, we may well believe, was the tenor of that first meeting of Samuel and Saul. We cannot but carry forward our thoughts a little, and think what was the last. The last meeting was at Endor, where in dark-

ness and utter despair, the king of Israel had thought of his early friend, had perhaps recalled his gentle kindness on this first occasion of their meeting, and wondered whether he might not be able and willing to throw some light once more upon his path. But alas, the day of merciful visitation was gone. The first conversation was in the brightness of early morning; the last in midnight gloom. The time of day was appropriate for each. On that sepulchral night, the worst evils that he had dreaded, and against which he had doubtless warned him on that housetop, had come to pass. Self-willed and regardless of God, Saul had taken his own course, and brought his people to the very verge of ruin. Differing, *toto cælo*, from Samuel in his treatment of his successor, he had hunted David like a partridge on the mountains, and stormed against the man who was to bring back to the nation the blessings of which he had robbed it. Brought to bay at last by his recklessness and passion, he could only reap the fruit of what he had sown; "for God is not mocked; they that sow to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, and they that sow to the Spirit shall, of the Spirit, reap life everlasting." Again there was to ring out the great law of the kingdom,—"Them that honour Me, I will honour; while they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed."

The good words of Samuel fell not into good ground. He had not in Saul a congenial hearer. Saul was too worldly a man to care for, or appreciate spiritual things. Alas, how often for a similar reason, the best words of the best men fail of their purpose! But how is this ever to be cured? How is the uncongenial heart to become a fit bed for the good seed of the Kingdom? I own, it is a most difficult thing. Those who are

afflicted with indifference to spiritual truth will not seek a remedy, because the very essence of their malady is that they do not care. But surely their Christian friends and relatives, and all interested in their welfare, will care very much. Have you such persons—persons whose worldly hearts show no sympathy with Divine truth—among your acquaintances or in your families? Persons so steeped in worldliness that the strongest statements of saving truth are as much lost upon them as grains of the best wheat would be lost if sown in a heap of sand? O how should you be earnest for such in prayer; there is a remedy, and there is a Physician able to apply it; the Spirit of God if appealed to, can repeat the process that was so effectual at Philippi, when "the Lord opened the heart of Lydia, that she *attended* to the things that were spoken by Paul." "If ye then that are evil know how to give good things unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him."

CHAPTER XIII.

SAUL ANOINTED BY SAMUEL.

1 Samuel x. 1—16.

THERE is a remarkable minuteness of detail in this and other narratives in Samuel, suggesting the authenticity of the narrative, and the authorship of one who was personally connected with the transactions. The historical style of Scripture is very characteristic; sometimes great periods of time are passed over with hardly a word, and sometimes events of little apparent importance are recorded with what might be thought needless minuteness. In Genesis, the whole history of the world before the flood is despatched in seven chapters, less than is occupied with the history of Joseph. Enoch's biography is in one little verse, while a whole chapter is taken up with the funeral of Sarah, and another chapter of unusual length with the marrying of Isaac. Yet we can be at no loss to discover good reasons for this arrangement. It combines two forms of history—annals, and dramatic story. Annals are short, and necessarily somewhat dry; but they have the advantage of embracing much in comparatively short compass. The dramatic story is necessarily diffuse; it occupies a large amount of space; but it has the advantage of presenting a living picture—of bringing past events before the reader as they happened

at the time. If the whole history of the Bible had been in the form of annals, it would have been very useful, but it would have wanted human interest. If it had been all in the dramatic form, it would have occupied too much space. By the combination of the two methods, we secure the compact precision of the one, and the living interest of the other. In the verses that are to form the subject of the present lecture, we have a lively dramatic picture of what took place in connection with the anointing of Saul by Samuel as king of Israel. The event was a very important one, as showing the pains that were taken to impress him with the solemnity of the office, and his obligation to undertake it in full accord with God's sacred purpose in connection with His people Israel. Everything was planned to impress on Saul that his elevation to the royal dignity was not to be viewed by him as a mere piece of good fortune, and to induce him to enter on the office with a solemn sense of responsibility, and in a spirit entirely different from that of the neighbouring kings, who thought only of their royal position as enabling them to gratify the desires of their own hearts. Both Saul and the people must see the hand of God very plainly in Saul's elevation, and the king must enter on his duties with a profound sense of the supernatural influences through which he has been elevated, and his obligation to rule the people in the fear, and according to the will, of God.

Though the servant that accompanied Saul seems to have been as much a companion and adviser as a servant, and to have been present as yet in all Samuel's intercourse with Saul, yet the act of anointing which the prophet was now to perform was more suitable to be done in private than in the presence

of another; consequently the servant was sent on before (ch. ix. 27). It would seem to have been Samuel's intention, while paying honour to Saul as one to whom honour was due, and thus hinting at his coming elevation, not to make it public, not to anticipate the public selection which would follow soon in an orderly way. It was right that Saul himself should know what was coming, and that his mind should be prepared for it; but it was not right at this stage that others should know it, for that would have seemed an interference with the choice of the people. It must have been in some quiet corner of the road that Samuel took out his vial of sacred oil, and poured it on Saul to anoint him king of Israel. The kiss which he gave him was the kiss of homage, a very old way of recognizing sovereignty (Ps. ii. 12), and still kept up in the custom of kissing the sovereign's hand after elevation to office or dignity. To be thus anointed by God's recognised servant, was to receive the approval of God Himself. Saul now became God's messiah—the Lord's anointed. For the term messiah, as applied to Christ, belongs to His kingly office. Though the priests likewise were anointed, the title derived from that act was not appropriated by them, but by the kings. It was counted a high and solemn dignity, making the king's person sacred, in the eyes of every God-fearing man. Yet this was not an indelible character; it might be forfeited by unfaithfulness and transgression. The only Messiah, the only Anointed One, who was incapable of being set aside, was He whom the kings of Israel typified. Of Him Isaiah foretold: "Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to order it and to establish it

with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever." And in announcing the birth of Jesus, the angel foretold: "He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end."

It is evident that Saul was surprised at the acts of Samuel. We can readily fancy his look of astonishment after the venerable prophet had given him the kiss of homage,—the searching gaze that asked, "What do you mean by that?" Samuel was ready with his answer: "Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over His heritage?" But in so momentous a matter, involving a supernatural communication of the will of God, an assurance even from Samuel was hardly sufficient. It was reasonable that Saul should be supplied with tangible proofs that in anointing him as king Samuel had complied with the will of God. These tangible proofs Samuel proceeded to give. They consisted of predictions of certain events that were about to happen—events that it was not within the range of ordinary sagacity to foresee, and which were therefore fitted to convince Saul that Samuel was in possession of supernatural authority, and that the act of consecration which he had just performed was agreeable to the will of God.

The first of these proofs was, that when he had proceeded on his journey as far as Rachel's tomb, he would meet with two men who would tell him that the lost asses had been found, and that his father's anxiety was now about his son. It must be owned that the localities here are very puzzling. If the meeting with Samuel was near Ramah of Benjamin, Saul, in returning to Gibeah, would not have occasion to go near Rachel's tomb. We can only say he may have had some reason

for taking this route unknown to us. Here he would find a confirmation of what Samuel had told him on the day before; and his mind being thus relieved of anxiety, he would have more freedom to ponder the marvellous things of which Samuel had spoken to him.

The next token was to be found in the plain of Tabor, but this Tabor can have no connection with the well-known mountain of that name in the plain of Esdraelon. Some have conjectured that this Tabor is derived from Deborah, Rachel's nurse, who was buried in the neighbourhood of Bethel (Gen. xxxv. 8), but there is no probability in this conjecture. Here three men, going up to Bethel to a religious festival were to meet Saul; and they were to present him, as an act of homage, with two of their three loaves. This was another evidence that God was filling men's hearts with a rare feeling towards him.

The third token was to be the most remarkable of any. It was to occur at what is called "the hill of God." Literally this is "Gibeah of God"—God's Gibeah. It seems to have been Saul's own city, but the name Gibeah may have been given to the whole hill where the city lay. The precise spot where the occurrence was to take place was at the garrison of the Philistines. (Thus it appears incidentally that the old enemy were again harassing the country.) Gibeah, which is elsewhere called Gibeah of Saul, is here called God's Gibeah, because of the sacred services of which it was the seat. Here Saul would meet a company of prophets coming down from the holy place, with psaltery, and tabret, and pipe, and harp, and here his mind would undergo a change, and he would be impelled to join the prophets' company. This was a strange token, with a strange result.

We must try, first, to form some idea of Saul's state of mind in the midst of these strange events.

The thought of his being king of Israel must have set his whole being vibrating with high emotion. No mind can take in at first all that is involved in such a stroke of fortune. A tumult of feeling surges through the mind. It is intoxicated with the prospect. Glimpses of this pleasure and of that, now brought within reach, flit before the fancy. The whole pulses of Saul's nature must have been quickened. A susceptibility of impression formerly unknown must have come to him. He was like a cloud surcharged with electricity; he was in that state of nervous excitement which craves a physical outlet, whether in singing, or shouting, or leaping,—anything to relieve the brain and nervous system, which seem to tremble and struggle under the extraordinary pressure.

But mingling with this, there must have been another, and perhaps deeper, emotion at work in Saul's bosom. He had been brought into near contact with the Supernatural. The thought of the Infinite Power that ordains and governs all had been stirred very vividly within him. The three tokens of Divine ordination met with in succession at Rachel's tomb, in the plain of Tabor, and in the neighbourhood of Gibeah, must have impressed him very profoundly. Probably he had never had any very distinct impression of the great Supernatural Being before. The worldly turn of mind which was natural to him would not occupy itself with any such thoughts. But now it was made clear to him not only that there was a Supernatural Being, but that He was dealing very closely with him. It is always a solemn thing to feel in the presence of God, and to remember that He is searching us and knowing us,

knowing our sitting down and our rising up, and comprehending all our thoughts afar off. At such times the sense of our guilt, feebleness, dependence, usually comes on us, full and strong. Must it not have been so with Saul? If the prospect of kingly power was fitted to puff him up, the sense of God's nearness to him was fitted to cast him down. What was he before God? An insignificant worm, a guilty sinner, unworthy to be called God's son.

The whole susceptibilities of Saul were in a state of high excitement; the sense of the Divine presence was on him, and for the moment a desire to render to God some acknowledgment of all the mercy which had come upon him. When the company of prophets met him coming down the hill, "the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied with them." When in the Old Testament the Spirit of God is said to come on one, the meaning is not always that He comes in regenerating and sanctifying grace. The Spirit of God in Bezaleel, the son of Uri, made him cunning in all manner of workmanship, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass. The Spirit of God, when He came upon Samson, magnified his physical strength, and fitted him for the most wonderful feats. So the Spirit of God, when He came on Saul, did not necessarily regenerate his being; alas! in Saul's future life, there is only too much evidence of an unchanged heart! Still it might be said of Saul that he was changed into another man. Elevated by the prospect before him, but awed at the same time by a sense of God's nearness, he had no heart for the pursuits in which he would have engaged on his return home had no such change occurred. In the mood of mind in which he was now, he could not look at anything

frivolous: his mind soared to higher things. When therefore he met the company of prophets coming down the hill, he was impelled by the surge of his feelings to join their company and take part in their song. They were returning from the high place where they had been engaged in worship, and now they seem to have been continuing the service, sounding out the high praises of God, and thankfully remembering His mercies. It was the same God who had so wonderfully drawn near to Saul, and conferred on him privileges which were as exalted as they were undeserved. No wonder the heart of Saul caught the infection, and threw itself for the time into the service of praise! No young man could well have resisted the impulse. Had he not been chosen out of all the ten thousands of Israel for an honour and a function higher than any Israelite had ever yet enjoyed? Ought he not, must he not, in all the enthusiasm of profoundest wonder, extol the name of Him from whom so suddenly, so unexpectedly, yet so assuredly, this marvellous favour had come?

But it was an employment very different from what had hitherto been his custom. That utter worldliness of mind which we have referred to as his natural disposition would have made him scorn any such employment in his ordinary mood as utterly alien to his feelings. Too often we see that worldly-minded men not only have no relish for spiritual exercises, but feel bitterly and scornfully toward those who affect them. The reason is not far to seek. They know that religious men count them guilty of sin, of great sin, in so neglecting the service of God. To be condemned, whether openly or not, galls their pride, and sets them to disparage those who have so low an opinion of them. It is not said that Saul had felt

bitterly toward religious men previous to this time. But whether he did so or not, he appears to have kept aloof from them quite as much as if he had. And now in his own city he appears among the prophets, as if sharing their inspiration, and joining with them openly in the praises of God. It is so strange a sight that every one is astonished. "Saul among the prophets!" people exclaim. "Shall wonders ever cease?" And yet Saul was not in his right place among the prophets. Saul was like the stony ground seed in the parable of the sower. He had no depth of root. His enthusiasm on this occasion was the result of forces that did not work at the heart of his nature. It was the result of the new and most remarkable situation in which he found himself, not of any new principle of life, any principle that would involve a radical change. It is a solemn fact that men may be worked on by outer forces so as to do many things that seem to be acts of Divine service, but are not so really. A man suddenly raised to a high and influential position feels the influence of the change,—feels himself sobered and solemnized by it, and for a time appears to live and act under higher considerations than he used to acknowledge before. But when he gets used to his new position, when the surprise has abated, and everything around him has become normal to him, his old principles of action return. A young man called suddenly to take the place of a most worthy and honoured father feels the responsibility of wearing such a mantle, and struggles for a time to fulfil his father's ideal. But ere long the novelty of his position wears away, the thought of his father recurs less frequently, and his old views and feelings resume their sway. Admission to the fellowship of a Church which

sustains a high repute may have at first not only a restraining, but a stimulating and elevating effect, until, the position becoming familiar to one, the emotions it first excited die away. This risk is peculiarly incident to those who bear office in the Church. Ordination to the ministry, or to any other spiritual office, solemnizes one at first, even though one may not be truly converted, and nerves one with strength and resolution to throw off many an evil habit. But the solemn impression wanes with time, and the carnal nature asserts its claims. How earnest and how particular men ought ever to be in examining themselves whether their serious impressions are the effect of a true change of nature, or whether they are not mere temporary experiences, the casual result of external circumstances.

But how is this to be ascertained? Let us recall the test with which our Lord has furnished us. "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name have cast out devils, and in Thy name have done many wonderful works? Then will I say unto them, I never knew you; depart from Me, ye that work iniquity." The real test is a changed will; a will no longer demanding that self be pleased, but that God be pleased; a will yielding up everything to the will of God; a will continually asking what is right and what is true, not what will please me, or what will be a gain to me; a will overpowered by the sense of what is due in nature to the Lord and Judge of all, and of what is due in grace to Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His

own blood. Have you thus surrendered yourselves to God? At the heart and root of your nature is there the profound desire to do what is well-pleasing in His sight? If so, then, even amid abounding infirmities, you may hold that you are the child of God. But if still the principle—silent, perhaps, and unavowed, but real—that moves you and regulates your life be that of self-pleasing, any change that may have occurred otherwise must have sprung only from outward conditions, and the prayer needs to go out from you on the wings of irrepressible desire, "Create in me a clean heart, O Lord, and renew a right spirit within me."

Two things in this part of the chapter have yet to be adverted to. The first is that somewhat mysterious question (ver. 12) which some one asked on seeing Saul among the prophets—"But who is their father?" Various explanations have been given of this question; but the most natural seems to be, that it was designed to meet a reason for the surprise felt at Saul being among the prophets—viz. that his father Kish was a godless man. That consideration is irrelevant; for who, asks this person, is the father of the prophets? The prophetic gift does not depend on fatherhood. It is not by connection with their fathers that the prophetic band enjoy their privileges. Why should not Saul be among the prophets as well as any of them? Such men are born not of blood, nor of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God.

The other point remaining to be noticed is Saul's concealment from his uncle of all that Samuel had said about the kingdom. It appears from this both that Saul was yet of a modest, humble spirit, and perhaps that his uncle would have made an unwise use of the information if he had got it. It would be time enough

for that to be known when God's way of bringing it to pass should come. There is a time to speak and a time to keep silence. Saul told enough to the uncle to establish belief in the supernatural power of Samuel, but nothing to gratify mere curiosity. Thus in many ways Saul commends himself to us in this chapter, and in no way does he provoke our blame. He was like the young man in the Gospel in whom our Lord found so much that was favourable. Alas, he was like the young man also in the particular that made all the rest of little effect—"One thing thou lackest."

CHAPTER XIV.

SAUL CHOSEN KING.

1 Samuel x. 17—27.

WHEN first the desire to have a king came to a height with the people, they had the grace to go to Samuel, and endeavour to arrange the matter through him. They did not, indeed, show much regard to his feelings; rather they showed a sort of childlike helplessness, not appearing to consider how much he would be hurt both by their virtual rejection of his government, and by their blunt reference to the unworthy behaviour of his sons. But it was a good thing that they came to Samuel at all. They were not prepared to carry out their wishes by lawless violence; they were not desirous to make use of the usual Oriental methods of revolution—massacre and riot. It was so far well that they desired to avail themselves of the peaceful instrumentality of Samuel. We have seen how Samuel carried the matter to the Lord, and how the Lord yielded so far to the wish of the nation as to permit them to have a king. And Samuel having determined not to take offence, but to continue in friendly relations to the people and do his utmost to turn the change to the best possible account, now proceeds to superintend the business of election. He summons the people to the Lord to Mizpeh; that is,

he convenes the heads of the various tribes to a meeting, which was not to be counted a rough political convention, but a solemn religious gathering in the very presence of the Lord. Either before the meeting, or at the meeting, the principle must have been settled on which the election was to be made. It was, however, not so much the people that were to choose as God. The selection was to take place by lot. This method was resorted to as the best fitted to show who was the object of God's choice. There seems to have been no trace of difference of opinion as to its being the right method of procedure.

But before the lot was actually cast, Samuel addressed to the assembly one of those stern, terrible exposures of the spirit that had led to the transaction which would surely have turned a less self-willed and stiff-necked people from their purpose, and constrained them to revert to their original economy. "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel: I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that oppressed you; and ye have this day rejected your God, who Himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and ye have said unto Him, Nay, but set a king over us." How *could* the people, we may well ask, get over this? How could they prefer an earthly king to a heavenly? What possible benefit worth naming could accrue to them from a transaction dishonouring to the Lord of heaven, which, if it did not make Him their enemy, could not but chill His interest in them?

Perhaps, however, we may wonder less at the behaviour of the Israelites on this occasion if we bear in mind how often the same offence is committed, and

with how little thought and consideration, at the present day. To begin with, take the case—and it is a very common one—of those who have been dedicated to God in baptism, but who cast their baptismal covenant to the winds. The time comes when the provisional dedication to the Lord should be followed up by an actual and hearty consecration of themselves. Failing that, what can be said of them but that they reject God as their King? And with what want of concern is this often done, and sometimes in the face of remonstrances, as, for instance, by the many young men in our congregations who allow the time for decision to pass without ever presenting themselves to the Church as desirous to take on them the yoke of Christ! A moment's thought might show them that if they do not actively join themselves to Christ, they virtually sever themselves from Him. If I make a provisional bargain with any one to last for a short time, and at the end of that time take no steps to renew it, I actually renounce it. Not to renew the covenant of baptism, when years of discretion have been reached, is virtually to break it off. Much consideration must be had for the consciousness of unworthiness, but even that is not a sufficient reason, because our worthiness can never come from what we are in ourselves, but from our faith in Him who alone can supply us with the wedding garment.

Then there are those who reject God in a more outrageous form. There are those who plunge boldly into the stream of sin, or into the stream of worldly enjoyment, determined to lead a life of pleasure, let the consequences be what they may. As to religion, it is nothing to them, except a subject of ridicule on the part of those who affect it. Morality—well, if it fall

within the fashion of the world, it must be respected otherwise let it go to the winds. God, heaven, hell,—they are mere bugbears to frighten the timid and superstitious. Not only is God rejected, but He is defied. Not only are His blessing, His protection, His gracious guidance scorned, but the devil, or the world, or the flesh is openly elevated to His throne. Yet men and women too can go on through years of life utterly unconcerned at the slight they offer to God, and unmoved by any warning that may come to them "Who is the Almighty that we should serve Him? And what profit shall we have if we bow down before Him?" Their attitude reminds us of the answer of the persecutor, when the widow of his murdered victim protested that he would have to answer both to man and to God for the deed of that day. "To man," he said, "I can easily answer; and as for God, I will take Him in my own hands."

But there is still another class against whom the charge of rejecting God may be made. Not, indeed, in the same sense or to the same degree, but with one element of guilt which does not attach to the others, inasmuch as they have known what it is to have God for their King. I advert to certain Christian men and women who in their early days were marked by much earnestness of spirit, but having risen in the world, have fallen back from their first attainments, and have more or less accepted the world's law. Perhaps it was of their poorer days that God had cause to remember "the kindness of their youth and the love of their espousals." Then they were earnest in their devotions, full of interest in Christian work, eager to grow in grace and in all the qualities of a Christlike character. But as they grew in wealth, and rose in

the world, a change came o'er the spirit of their dream. They must have fine houses and equipages, and give grand entertainments, and cultivate the acquaintance of this great family and that, and get a recognized position among their fellows. Gradually their life comes to be swayed by considerations they never would have thought of in early days. Gradually the strict rules by which they used to live are relaxed, and an easier and more accommodating attitude towards the world is taken up. And as surely the glow of their spiritual feelings cools down; the charm of their spiritual enjoyments goes off; the blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, fades away; and one scheme after another of worldly advancement and enjoyment occupies their minds. What glamour has passed over their souls to obliterate the surpassing glory of Jesus Christ, the image of the invisible God? What evil spell has robbed the Cross of its holy influence, and made them so indifferent to the Son of God, who loved them and gave Himself for them? Is the gate of heaven changed, that they no longer care to linger at it, as in better times they used so fondly to do? No. But they have left their first love; they have gone away after idols; they have been caught in the snares of the god of this world. In so far, they have rejected their God that saved them out of all their adversities and tribulations; and if they go on to do so after solemn warning, their guilt will be like the guilt of Israel, and the day must come when "their own wickedness shall correct them, and their backslidings shall reprove them."

But let us come back to the election. The first lot was cast between the twelve tribes, and it fell on Benjamin. The next lot was cast between the families

of Benjamin, and it fell on the family of Matri; and when they came to closer quarters, as it were, the lot fell on Saul, the son of Kish. Again we see how the most casual events are all under government, and conspire to accomplish the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will. "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord."

No doubt Saul had anticipated this consummation. He had had too many supernatural evidences to the same effect to have any lingering doubt what would be the result of the lot. But it was too much for him. He hid himself, and could not be found. And we do not think the worse of him for this, but rather the better. It is one of the many favourable traits that we find at the outset of his kingly career. However pleasant it might be to ruminate on the privileges and honours of royalty, it was a serious thing to undertake the leadership of a great nation. In this respect, Saul shared the feeling that constrained Moses to shrink back when he was appointed to deliver Israel from Egypt, and that constrained Jeremiah to remonstrate when he was appointed a prophet unto the nations. Many of the best ministers of Christ have had this feeling when they were called to the Christian ministry. Gregory Nazianzen actually fled to the wilderness after his ordination, and Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, in the civil office which he held, tried to turn the people from their choice even by acts of cruelty and severity, after they had called on him to become their bishop.

But, besides the natural shrinking of Saul from so responsible an office, we may believe that he was not unmoved by the solemn representation of Samuel that in their determination to have a human king the people

had been guilty of rejecting God. This may have been the first time that that view of the matter seriously impressed itself on his mind. Even though it was accompanied by the qualification that God in a sense sanctioned the new arrangement, and though the use of the lot would indicate God's choice, Saul might well have been staggered by the thought that in electing a king the people had rejected God. Even though his mind was not a spiritual mind, there was something frightful in the very idea of a man stepping, so to speak, into God's place. No wonder then though he hid himself! Perhaps he thought that when he could not be found the choice would fall on some one else. But no. An appeal was again made to God, and God directly indicated Saul, and indicated his place of concealment. The stuff or baggage among which Saul was hid was the collection of packages which the people would naturally bring with them, and which it was the custom to pile up, often as a rampart or defence, while the assembly lasted. We can fancy the scene when, the pile of baggage being indicated as the hiding-place, the people rushed to search among it, knocking the contents asunder very unceremoniously, until Saul was at length discovered. From his inglorious place of retreat the king was now brought out, looking no doubt awkward and foolish, yet with that commanding figure which seemed so suitable for his new dignity. And his first encouragement was the shout of the people—"God save the king!" How strange and quick the transition! A minute ago he was safe in his hiding-place, wondering whether some one else might not get the office. Now the shouts of the people indicate that all is settled. King of Israel he is henceforward to be.

Three incidents are recorded towards the end of the

chapter as throwing light on the great event of the day. In the first place, "Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the Lord." This was another means taken by the faithful prophet to secure that this new step should if possible be for good, and not for evil. It was a new protest against assimilating the kingdom of Israel to the other kingdoms around. No! although Jehovah was no longer King in the sense in which He had been, His covenant and His law were still binding, and must be observed in Israel to their remotest generation. No change could repeal the law of the ten words given amid the thunders of Sinai. No change could annul the promise to Abraham, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." No change could reverse that mode of approach to a holy God which had been ordained for the sinner—through the shedding of atoning blood. The destiny of Israel was not changed, as the medium of God's communications to the world on the most vital of all subjects in which sinners could be interested. And king though he was, Saul would find that there was no way of securing the true prosperity of his kingdom but by ruling it in the fear of God, and with the highest regard to His will and pleasure; while nothing was so sure to drive it to ruin, as to depart from the Divine prescription, and plunge into the ways that were common among the heathen.

The next circumstance mentioned in the history is, that when the people dispersed, and when Saul returned to his home at Gibeah, "there went with him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched." They were induced to form a body-guard for the new king, and they did so under no physical constraint from him or

any one else, but because they were moved to do it from sympathy, from the desire to help him and be of service to him in the new position to which he had been raised. Here was a remarkable encouragement. A friend in need is a friend indeed. Could there have been any time when Saul was more in need of friends? How happy a thing it was that he did not need to go and search for them; they came to him with their willing service. And what a happy start it was for him in his new office that these helpers were at hand to serve him! A band of willing helpers around one takes off more than half the difficulty of a difficult enterprise. Men that enter into one's plans, that sympathize with one's aims, that are ready to share one's burdens, that anticipate one's wishes, are of priceless value in any business. But they are of especial value in the Church of Christ. One of the first things our Lord did after entering on His public ministry was to call to Himself the twelve, who were to be His staff, His ready helpers wherever they were able to give help. Is it not the joy of the Christian minister, as he takes up his charge, if there go with him a band of men whose hearts God has touched? How lonely and how hard is the ministry if there be no such men to help! How different when efficient volunteers are there, in readiness for the Sunday-school, and the Band of hope, and the missionary society, and the congregational choir, and for visiting the sick, and every other service of Christian love! Congregations ought to feel that it cannot be right to leave all the work to their minister. What kind of battle would it be if all the fighting were left to the officer in command? Let the members of congregations ever bear in mind that it is their duty and their privilege to help in the work. If we wish to see the

picture of a prosperous Apostolic Church, let us study the last chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. The glory of the primitive Church of Rome was that it abounded in men and women whose hearts God had touched, and who "laboured much in the Lord."

Do any of us shrink from such work? Are any willing to pray for God's work, but unwilling to take part in it personally? Such a state of mind cannot but suggest the question, Has the Lord touched your hearts? The expression is a very significant one. It implies that one touch of God's hand, one breathing of His Spirit, can effect such a change that what was formerly ungenial becomes agreeable; a vital principle is imparted to the heart. Life can come only from the fountain of life. Hearts can be quickened only by the living Spirit of God. In vain shall we try to serve Him until our hearts are touched by His Spirit. Would that that Spirit were poured forth so abundantly that "one should say, I am the Lord's, and another should call himself by the name of Jacob, and another should subscribe with his hand to the Lord, and surname himself with the name of Israel"!

The last thing to be noticed is the difference of feeling toward Saul among the people. While he was received cordially by most, there was a section that despised him, that scorned the idea of his delivering the nation, and, in token of their contempt, brought him no presents. They are called the children of Belial. It was not that they regarded his election as an invasion of the ancient constitution of the country, as an interference with the sovereign rights of Jehovah, but that, in their pride, they refused to submit to him; they would not have him for their king. The tokens

of Divine authority—the sanction of Samuel, the use of the lot, and the other proofs that what was done at Mizpeh had been ratified in heaven—made no impression upon them. We are told of Saul that he held his peace; he would rather refute them by deeds than by words; he would let it be seen, when the opportunity offered, whether he could render any service to the nation or not. But does not this ominous fact, recorded at the very threshold of Saul's reign, at the very time when it became so apparent that he was the Lord's anointed, suggest to our minds a corresponding fact, in reference to One who is the Lord's Anointed in a higher sense? Is there not in many a disposition to say even of the Lord Jesus Christ, "How shall this man save us"? Do not many rob the Lord Jesus Christ of His saving power, reducing Him to the level of a mere teacher, denying that He shed His blood to take away sin? And are there not others who refuse their homage to the Lord from sheer self-dependence and pride? They have never been convinced of their sins, never shared the publican's feeling, but rather been disposed to boast, like the Pharisee, that they were not like other men. And is not Christ still to many as a root out of a dry ground, without form or comeliness wherefore they should desire Him? Oh for the spirit of wisdom and illumination in the knowledge of Him! Oh that, the eyes of our understandings being enlightened, we might all see Jesus fairer than the children of men, the chief among ten thousand, yea altogether lovely; and that, instead of our manifesting any unwillingness to acknowledge Him and follow Him, the language of our hearts might be, "Whom have we in heaven but Thee? and there is none on the earth that we desire besides

Thee." "Entreat us not to leave Thee, nor to return from following after Thee; for where Thou goest we will go, and where Thou lodgest we will lodge; Thy people shall be our people," and Thou Thyself our Lord and our God.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RELIEF OF JABESH-GILEAD.

1 Samuel xi.

PRIMITIVE though the state of society was in those days in Israel, we are hardly prepared to find Saul following the herd in the field after his election as king of Israel. We are compelled to conclude that the opposition to him was far from contemptible in number and in influence, and that he found it expedient in the meantime to make no demonstration of royalty, but continue his old way of life. If we go back to the days of Abimelech, the son of Gideon, we get a vivid view of the awful crimes which even an Israelite could commit, under the influence of jealousy, when other persons stood in the way of his ambitious designs. It is quite conceivable that had Saul at once assumed the style and title of royalty, those children of Belial who were so contemptuous at his election would have made away with him. Human life was of so little value in those Eastern countries, and the crime of destroying it was so little thought of, that if Saul had in any way provoked hostility, he would have been almost certain to fall by some assassin's hand. It was therefore wise of him to continue for a time his old way of living, and wait for some opportunity which should arise providentially, to vindicate his title to the sceptre of Israel.

Apparently he had not to wait long—according to Josephus, only a month. The opportunity arose in a somewhat out-of-the-way part of the country, where disturbance had been brewing previous to his election (comp. xii. 12). It was not the first time that the inhabitants of Gilead and other dwellers on the east side of Jordan came to feel that in settling there they had to pay dear for their well-watered and well-sheltered pastures. They were exposed in an especial degree to the assaults of enemies, and pre-eminent among these were their cousins, the Ammonites. Very probably the Ammonites had never forgotten the humiliation inflicted on them by Jephthah, when he smote them "from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, even twenty cities, and till thou come to the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter." Naturally the Ammonites would be desirous both to avenge these defeats and to regain their cities, or at least to get other cities in lieu of what they had lost. We do not know with certainty the site of Jabesh-Gilead, or the reasons why it was the special object of attack by King Nahash at this time. But so it was; and as the people of Jabesh-Gilead either knew not or cared not for their real defence, the God of Israel, they found themselves too hard bestead by the Ammonites, and, exhausted probably by the weary siege, proposed terms of capitulation.

This is the first scene in the chapter before us. "The men of Jabesh said to Nahash, king of the Ammonites, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee." The history of the Israelites in time of danger commonly presents one or other of two extremes: either pusillanimous submission, or daring defiance to the hostile power. In this case it was pusillanimous submission, as indeed it commonly was

when the people followed the motions of their own hearts, and were not electrified into opposition by some great hero, full of faith in God. But it was not mere cowardice they displayed in offering to become the servants of the Ammonites; there was impiety in it likewise. For of their relation to God they made no account whatever. By covenant with their fathers, ratified from generation to generation, they were God's servants, and they had no right voluntarily to transfer to another master the allegiance which was due to God alone. The proposal they made was virtually a breach of the first commandment. And it was not a case of necessity. Instead of humbling themselves before God and confessing the sins that had brought them into trouble, they put God altogether aside, and basely offered to become the servants of the Ammonites. Even the remembrance of the glorious victories of their own Jephthah, when he went to war with the Ammonites, in dependence on the God of Israel, seems to have had no effect in turning them from the inglorious proposal. We see here the sad effect of sin and careless living in lowering men's spirits, sapping courage, and discouraging noble effort. Oh, it is pitiable to see men tamely submitting to a vile master! Yet how often is the sight repeated! How often do men virtually say to the devil, "Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee"! Not indeed in the open way in which it used to be believed that one of the popes, before his elevation to the papal chair, formally sold his soul to the devil in exchange for that dignity. Yet how often do men virtually give themselves over to serve a vile master, to lead evil or at least careless lives, to indulge in sinful habits which they know they should overcome, but which they are too indolent and self-indulged to

resist! Men and women, with strong proclivities to sin, may for a time resist, but they get tired of the battle; they long for an easier life, and they say in their hearts, "We will resist no longer; we will become your servants." They are willing to make peace with the Ammonites, because they are wearied of fighting. "Anything for a quiet life!" They surrender to the enemy, they are willing to serve sin, because they will not surrender the ease and the pleasures of sin.

But sin is a bad master; his wages are terrible to think of. The terms which Nahash offered to the men of Jabesh-Gilead combined insult and injury. "On this condition will I make a covenant with you: that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach unto all Israel." "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." There is nothing in which the pernicious influence of paganism was more notorious in ancient times—and indeed, we may say, is more notorious in all times—than in the horrible cruelties to which it led. Barbarity was the very element in which it lived. And that barbarity was often exemplified in cruelly depriving enemies of those members and organs of the body which are most needful for the comfort of life. The hands and the eyes were especially the victims of this diabolical feeling. Just as you may see at this day in certain African villages miserable creatures without hands or eyes who have fallen under the displeasure of their chief and received this revolting treatment, so it was in those early times. But Nahash was comparatively merciful. He was willing to let the men of Jabesh off with the loss of one eye only. But as if to compensate for this forbearance, he declared that he would regard the transaction as a reproach upon all Israel. The mutilated condition of that poor one-eyed

community would be a ground for despising the whole nation; it would be a token of the humiliation and degradation of the whole Israelite community. These were the terms of Nahash. His favour could be purchased only by a cruel injury to every man's body and a stinging insult to their whole nation. But these terms were just too humiliating. Whether the men of Jabesh would have been willing to lose their eyes as the price of peace we do not know; but the proposed humiliation of the nation was something to which they were not prepared at once to submit. The nation itself should look to that. The nation should consider whether it was prepared to be thus insulted by the humiliation of one of its cities. Consequently they asked for a week's respite, that it might be seen whether the nation would not bestir itself to maintain its honour.

If we regard Nahash as a type of another tyrant, as representing the tyranny of sin, we may derive from his conditions an illustration of the hard terms which sin usually imposes. "The way of transgressors is hard." Oh, what untold misery does one act of sin often bring! One act of drunkenness, in which one is led to commit some crime of violence that would never have been dreamt of otherwise; one act of dishonesty, followed up by a course of deceit and double-dealing, that at last culminates in disgrace and ruin; one act of unchastity, leading to loss of character and to a downward career ending in utter darkness,—how frightful is the retribution! But happy is the young person, when under temptation to the service of sin, if there comes to him at the very threshold some frightful experience of the hardness of the service, if, like the men of Jabesh-Gilead, he is made to feel that the loss and humiliation are beyond endurance, and to

betake himself to the service of another Master, whose yoke is easy, whose burden is light, and whose rewards are more precious than silver and gold!

With the activity of despair, the men of Jabesh now publish throughout all Israel the terms that Nahash has offered them. At Gibeah of Saul a deep impression is made. But it is not the kind of impression that gives much hope. "All the people lifted up their voices and wept." It was just the way in which their forefathers had acted at the Red Sea, when, shut in between the mountains and the sea, they saw the chariots of Pharaoh advancing in battle array against them; and again, it was the way in which they spent that night in the wilderness after the spies brought back their report of the land. It was a sorrowful sight—a whole mass of people crying like babies, panic-stricken, and utterly helpless. But, as in the two earlier cases, there was a man of faith to roll back the wave of panic. As Moses at the Red Sea got courage to go forward, as Caleb, the faithful spy, was able to resist all the clamour of his colleagues and the people, so on this occasion the spirit that rises above the storm, and flings defiance even on the strongest enemies, came mightily on one man—on Saul. His conduct at this time is another evidence how well he conducted himself in the opening period of his reign. "The Spirit of the Lord came upon Saul when he heard the tidings, and his anger was kindled greatly." The Spirit of the Lord evidently means here that spirit of courage, of noble energy, of dauntless resolution, which was needed to meet the emergency that had arisen. His first act was a symbolical one, very rough in its nature, but an act of the kind that was best fitted to make an impression on an Eastern people. A yoke of oxen was hewn

in pieces, and the bloody fragments were sent by messengers throughout all Israel, with a thundering announcement that any one failing to follow Saul would have his own oxen dealt with in a similar fashion! It was a bold proclamation for a man to make who himself had just been following his herd in the field. But boldness, even audacity, is often the best policy. The thundering proclamation of Saul brought an immense muster of people to him. A sufficient portion of them would set out with the king, hastening down the passes to the Jordan valley, and having crossed the river, would bivouac for the night in some of the ravines that led up towards the city of Jabesh-Gilead. Messengers had been previously pushed forward to announce to the people there the approach of the relieving force. Long before daybreak, Saul had divided his force into three, who were to approach the beleaguered city by different roads and surprise the Ammonites by break of day. The plan was successfully carried out. The assault on the Ammonite army was made in the morning watch, and continued till midday. It was now the turn for the Ammonites to fall under panic. Their assailants seem to have found them entirely unprepared. There is nothing with which the undisciplined ranks of an Eastern horde are less able to cope than an unexpected attack. The defeat was complete, and the slaughter must have been terrific; and "it came to pass that they which remained of them were scattered, so that two of them were not left together." The men of Jabesh-Gilead, who had expected to spend that night in humiliation and anguish, would be sure to spend it in a very tumult of joy, perhaps rather in a wild excitement than in the calm but intensely relieved condition of men of whom the

sorrows of death had taken hold, but whom the Lord had delivered out of all their distresses.

It is no wonder though the people were delighted with their king. From first to last he had conducted himself admirably. He had not delayed an hour in taking the proper steps. Though wearied probably with his day's work among the herd, he set about the necessary arrangements with the utmost promptitude. It was a serious undertaking: first, to rouse to the necessary pitch a people who were more disposed to weep and wring their hands, than to keep their heads and devise a way of escape in the hour of danger; second, to gather a sufficient army to his standard; third, to march across the Jordan, attack the foe, confident and well equipped, and deliver the beleaguered city. But dangers and difficulties only roused Saul to higher exertions. And now, when in one short week he has completed an enterprise worthy to rank among the highest in the history of the nation, it is no wonder that the satisfaction of the people reaches an enthusiastic pitch. It would have been unaccountable had it been otherwise. And it is no wonder that their thoughts revert to the men who had stood in the way of his occupying the throne. Here is another proof that the opposition was more serious and more deadly than at first appears. These men were far from contemptible. Even now they might be a serious trouble to the nation. Would it not be good policy to get rid of them at once? Did they not deserve to die, and ought they not at once to be put to death? It is not likely that if this question had been mooted in the like circumstances in any of the neighbouring kingdoms, there would have been a moment's hesitation in answering it. But Saul was full of a magnanimous spirit—

nay, it seemed at the time a godly spirit. His mind was impressed with the fact that the deliverance of that day had come from God. And it was impressed at the same time with the grandeur and sublimity of the Divine power that had been brought into operation on behalf of Israel. Saul perceived a tremendous reality in the fact that "the Lord was their defence; the Holy One of Israel was their King." If Israel was encircled by such a garrison, if Israel's king was under such a Protector, what need he fear from a gang of miscreants like these children of Belial? Why dim the glory of the day by an act of needless massacre? Let forbearance to these misguided villains be another proof of the respect the nation had to the God of Jacob, as the Defender of Israel and Israel's King, and the certainty of their trust that He would defend them. And so "Saul said, There shall not a man be put to death this day; for to-day the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel."

O Saul, Saul, how well for thee it would have been hadst thou maintained this spirit! For then God would not have had to reject thee from being king, and to seek among the sheepfolds of Bethlehem a man after His own heart to be the leader of His people! And then thou wouldest have had no fear for the security of thy throne; thou wouldest not have hunted thy rival like a partridge on the mountains; and never, never wouldest thou have been tempted, in thy difficulties, to seek counsel from a woman with a familiar spirit, on the plea that God was departed from thee!

As we are thinking how well Saul has acted on this occasion, we perceive that an old friend has come on the scene who helps us materially to understand the situation. Yes, he is all the better of Samuel's guidance

and prayers. The good old prophet has no jealousy of the man who took his place as head of the nation. But knowing well the fickleness of the people, he is anxious to turn the occasion to account for confirming their feelings and their aims. Seeing how the king has acknowledged God as the Author of the victory, he desires to strike while the iron is hot. "Come," he says, "let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom there." Gilgal was the first place where the people had encamped under Joshua on crossing the Jordan. It was the place where the twelve stones taken from the empty bed of the river had been set up, as a testimony to the reality of the Divine presence in the midst of them. In some aspects, one might have thought that Samuel would invite them to Ebenezer, where he had set up the stone of help, and that he would add another testimony to the record that hitherto the Lord had helped them. But Gilgal was nearer to Jabesh-Gilead, and it was memorable for still higher traditions. To Gilgal accordingly they went, to renew the kingdom. "And there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal, and there they sacrificed sacrifices of peace-offerings before the Lord, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly."

The first election of Saul had been effected without any ceremonial, as if the people had been somewhat afraid to have a public coronation when it was obvious they had carried their point only by Divine sufferance, not by Divine command. But now, unequivocal testimony has been borne that, so long as Saul pays becoming regard to the heavenly King, the blessing and countenance of the Almighty will be his. Let him then be set apart with all due enthusiasm for his exalted office. Let his consecration take place in the most

solemn circumstances—let it be "before the Lord in Gilgal;" let it be accompanied with those sacrifices of peace-offerings which shall indicate respect for God's appointed method of reconciliation; and let it be conducted with such devout regard to Him and to His law, that when it is over, the Divine blessing shall seem to fall on Saul in the old form of benediction, "The Lord bless thee and keep thee; the Lord make His face to shine on thee and be gracious to thee; the Lord lift up His countenance on thee and give thee peace." Let the impression be deepened that "the God of Israel is He that giveth strength and power unto His people." Saul himself will not be the worse for having these feelings confirmed, and it will be of the highest benefit to the people.

And thus, under Samuel's guidance, the kingdom was renewed. Thus did both Saul and the people give unto the Lord the glory due to His name. And engaging in the ceremonial as they all did in this spirit, "both Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly." It was, perhaps, the happiest occasion in all the reign of Saul. What contributed the chief element of brightness to the occasion was—the sunshine of Heaven. God was there, smiling on His children. There were other elements too. Samuel was there, happy that Saul had conquered, that he had established himself upon the throne, and, above all, that he had, in a right noble way, acknowledged God as the Author of the victory at Jabesh-Gilead. Saul was there, reaping the reward of his humility, his forbearance, his courage, and his activity. The people were there, proud of their king, proud of his magnificent appearance, but prouder of the super-eminent qualities that had marked the commencement of his reign. Nor was the pleasure of any one

marred by any ugly blot or unworthy deed throwing a gloom over the transaction.

For one moment, let us compare the joy of this company with the feelings of men revelling in the pleasures of sin and sensuality, or even of men storing a pile of gold, the result of some successful venture or the legacy of some deceased relative. How poor the quality of the one joy compared to that of the other! For what is there outside themselves that can make men so happy as the smile of God? Or what condition of the soul can be so full, so overflowing with healthy gladness, as when the heart is ordered in accordance with God's law, and men are really disposed and enabled to love the Lord their God with all their heart, and to love their neighbours as themselves?

Is there not something of heaven in this joy? Is it not joy unspeakable and full of glory?

One other question: Is it *yours?*

CHAPTER XVI.

SAMUEL'S VINDICATION OF HIMSELF.

1 Samuel xii. 1—5.

IT was a different audience that Samuel had to address at Gilgal from either that which came to him to Ramah to ask for a king, or that which assembled at Mizpeh to elect one. To both of these assemblies he had solemnly conveyed his warning against the act of distrust in God implied in their wishing for a king at all, and against any disposition they might feel, when they got a king, to pay less attention than before to God's will and covenant. The present audience represented the army, undoubtedly a great multitude, that had gone forth with Saul to relieve Jabesh-Gilead, and that now came with Samuel to Gilgal to renew the kingdom. As the audience now seems to have been larger, so it very probably represented more fully the whole of the twelve tribes of Israel. This may explain to us why Samuel not only returned to the subject on which he had spoken so earnestly before, but enlarged on it at greater length, and appealed with more fulness to his own past life as giving weight to the counsels which he pressed upon them. Besides this, the recognition of Saul as king at Gilgal was more formal, more hearty, and more unanimous than at Mizpeh, and the institution of royalty was now more an established and

settled affair. No doubt, too, Samuel felt that, after the victory at Jabesh-Gilead, he had the people in a much more impressible condition than they had been in before; and while their minds were thus so open to impression, it was his duty to urge on them to the very uttermost the truths that bore on their most vital well-being.

The address of Samuel on this occasion bore on three things: 1 his own personal relations to them in the past (vers. 1-5); 2 the mode of God's dealing with their fathers, and its bearing on the step now taken (vers. 6-12); and 3 the way in which God's judgments might be averted and His favour and friendship secured to the nation in all time coming (vers. 13-25).

1. The reason why Samuel makes such explicit reference to his past life and such a strong appeal to the people as to its blameless character is, that he may establish a powerful claim for the favourable consideration of the advice which he is about to give them. The value of an advice no doubt depends simply on its own intrinsic excellence, but the *effect* of an advice depends partly on other things; it depends, to a great extent, on the disposition of people to think favourably of the person by whom the advice is given. If you have reason to suspect an adviser of a selfish purpose, if you know him to be a man who can plausibly represent that the course which he urges will be a great benefit to you, while in reality he has no real regard for any interest but his own, then, let him argue as he pleases, you do not allow yourselves to be moved by anything he may say. But if you have good cause to know that he is a disinterested man, if he has never shown himself to be selfish, but uniformly devoted to the interests of others, and especially of yourselves, you feel that

what such a man urges comes home to you with extraordinary weight. Now, the great object of Samuel in his reference to his past life was to bring the weight of this consideration to bear in favour of the advice he was to give to the people. For he could appeal to them with the greatest confidence as to his absolute disinterestedness. He could show that, with ever so many opportunities of acting a selfish part, no man could accuse him of having ever been guilty of crooked conduct in all his relations to the people. He could establish from their own mouths the position that he was as thoroughly devoted to the interests of the nation as any man could be. And therefore he called on them to give their most favourable and their most earnest attention to the advice which he was about to press on them, the more so that he was most profoundly convinced that the very existence of the nation in days to come depended on its being complied with.

The first consideration he urged was, that he had listened to their voice in making them a king. He had not obstructed nor baulked them in their strong feeling, though he might reasonably enough have done so. He had felt the proposal keenly as a reflection on himself, but he had waived that objection and gone on. He had regarded it as a slur on the Almighty, but the Almighty Himself had been pleased to forgive it, and he had transacted with Him on their behalf in the same way as before. Nothing that he had done in this matter could have an unfriendly aspect put on it. He had made the best of an objectionable proposal; and now they had not only got their wish, but along with it, objectionable though it was, a measure of the sanction of God. "And now, behold, the king walketh before you."

In the next place, Samuel adverts to his age. "I am old and grey-headed; and, behold, my sons are with you, and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day." You have had abundant opportunities to know me, and my manner of life. You know how I began, and you know how I have gone on, till now the circle of my years is nearly completed; a new generation has grown up; my sons are your contemporaries; I am old and grey-headed. You know how my childhood was spent in God's house in Shiloh, how God called me to be His prophet, and how I have gone on in that exalted office, trying ever to be faithful to Him that called me. What Samuel delicately points to here is the uniformity of his life. He had not begun on one line, then changed to another. He had not see-sawed nor zigzagged, one thing at one time, another at another; but from infancy to grey hairs he had kept steadfastly to the same course, he had ever served the same Master. Such steadiness and uniformity throughout a long life genders a wonderful weight of character. The man that has borne an honoured name through all the changes and temptations of life, through youth and middle age, and even to hoar hairs, that has served all that time under the same banner and never brought discredit on it, has earned a title to no ordinary esteem. It is this that forms the true glory of old age. Men instinctively pay honour to the hoary head when it represents a career of uniform and consistent integrity; and Christian men honour it all the more when it represents a lifetime of Christian activity and self-denial. Examine the ground of this reverence, and you will find it to be this: such a mature and consistent character could never have been attained but for many a struggle, in early life, of duty against inclination, and

many a victory of the higher principle over the lower, till at length the habit of well-doing was so established, that further struggles were hardly ever needed. Men think of him as one who has silently but steadily yielded up the baser desires of his nature all through his life to give effect to the higher and the nobler. They think of him as one who has sought all through life to give that honour to the will of God in which possibly they have felt themselves sadly deficient, and to encourage among their fellow-men, at much cost of self-denial, those ways of life which inflict no damage on our nature and bring a serene peace and satisfaction. Of such a mode of life, Samuel was an admirable representative. Men of that stamp are the true nobles of a community. Loyal to God and faithful to man; denying themselves and labouring to diffuse the spirit of all true happiness and prosperity; visiting the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and keeping themselves unspotted by the world—happy the community whose quiver is full of them! Happy the Church happy the country, that abounds in such worthies!—men, as Thomas Carlyle said of his peasant Christian father, of whom one should be prouder in one's pedigree than of dukes or kings, for what is the glory of mere rank or accidental station compared to the glory of Godlike qualities, and of a character which reflects the image of God Himself?

The third point to which Samuel adverts is his freedom from all acts of unjust exaction or oppression, and from all those corrupt practices in the administration of justice which were so common in Eastern countries. "Behold, here I am; witness against me before the Lord and before His anointed; whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom

have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it to you." It was no small matter to be able to make this challenge, which is as fearless in tone as it is comprehensive in range, in the very midst of such a sea of corruption as the neighbouring kingdoms of the East presented. It would seem as if, down to this day, the people in most of these despotic countries had never known any other *régime* but one of unjust exaction and oppression. We have seen, in an earlier chapter of this book, how shamefully the very priests abused the privilege of their sacred office to appropriate to themselves the offerings of God. In the days of our Lord and John the Baptist, what was it that rendered "the publicans" so odious but that their exactions went beyond the limits of justice and decency alike? Even to this day, the same system prevails as corrupt as ever. I have heard from an excellent American missionary a tale of a court of justice that came within his experience, even at a conspicuous place like Beirut, that shows that without bribery it is hardly possible to get a decision on the proper side. A claim had been made to a piece of land which he had purchased for his mission, and as he refused to pay what on the very face of it was obviously unjust, he was summoned before the magistrate. The delays that took place in dealing with the case were alike needless and vexatious, but the explanation came in a message from the authorities, slily conveyed to him, that the wheels of justice would move much faster if they were duly oiled with a little American gold. To such a proposal he would not listen for a moment, and it was only by threatening an exposure before the higher powers that the decision

was at last given where really there was not the shadow of a claim against him. From the same source I got an illustration of the exactions that are made to this day in the payment of taxes. The law provides that of the produce of the land one tenth shall belong to the Government for the public service. There is an officer whose duty it is to examine the produce of every farm, and carry off the share that the Government are entitled to. The farmer is not allowed to do anything with his produce till this officer has obtained the Government share. After harvest the farmers of a district will send word to the officer that their produce is ready, and invite him to come and take his tenth. The officer will return word that he is very busy, and will not be able to come for a month. The delay of a month would entail incalculable loss and inconvenience on the farmers. They know the situation well; and they send a deputation of their number to say that if he will only come at once, they are willing to give him two tenths instead of one, the second tenth being for his own use. But this too they are assured that he cannot do. And there is nothing for them but to remain with him higgling and bargaining, till at last perhaps, in utter despair, they promise him a proportion which will leave no more than the half available for themselves.

And these are not exceptional instances—they are the common experiences of Eastern countries, at least in the Turkish empire. When such dishonest practices prevail on every side, it often happens that even good men are carried away with them, and seem to imagine that, being universal, it is necessary for them to fall in with them too. It was a rare thing that Samuel was able to do to look round on that vast assembly and demand

whether one act of that kind had ever been committed by him, whether he had ever deviated even an hair-breadth from the rule of strict integrity and absolute honesty in all his dealings with them. Observe that Samuel was not like one of many, banded together to be true and upright, and supporting each other by mutual example and encouragement in that course. As far as appears, he was alone, like the seraph Abdiel, "faithful found among the faithless, faithful only he." What a regard he must have had for the law and authority of God! How rigidly he must have trained himself in public as in private life to make the will of God the one rule of his actions! What was it to him that slight peccadilloes would be thought nothing of by the public? What was it to him that men would have counted it only natural that of the money that passed through his hands a little should stick to his fingers, provided he was faithful in the main? What was it to him that this good man and that good man were in the way of doing it, so that, after all, he would be no worse than they? All such considerations would have been absolutely tossed aside. "Get thee behind me, Satan," would have been his answer to all such proposals. Unbending integrity, absolute honesty, unswerving truth, was his rule on every occasion. "How can I do this wickedness," would have been his question—"How can I do this great wickedness, *and sin against God?*"

Is there nothing here for us to ponder in these days of intense competition in business and questionable methods of securing gain? Surely the rule of unbending integrity, absolute honesty, and unswerving truth is as binding on the Christian merchant as it was on the Hebrew judge. Is the Christian merchant entitled to make use of the plea of general corruption around

him in business any more than Samuel was? Some say, How else are we to make a living? We answer, No man is entitled even to make a living on terms which shut him out from using the Lord's Prayer,—from saying, "Give us this day our daily bread." Who would dare to say that bread obtained by dishonesty or deceit is God-given bread? Who could ask God to bless any enterprise or transaction which had not truth and honesty for its foundation? Better let bread perish than get it by unlawful means. For "man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it." Instead of Christian men accepting the questionable ways of the world for pushing business, let them stand out as those who never can demean themselves by anything so unprincipled. No doubt Samuel was a poor man, though he might have been rich had he followed the example of heathen rulers. But who does not honour him in his poverty, with his incorruptible integrity and most scrupulous truthfulness, as no man would or could have honoured him had he accumulated the wealth of a Cardinal Wolsey and lived in splendour rivalling royalty itself? After all, it is the true rule, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

But ere we pass from the contemplation of Samuel's character, it is right that we should very specially take note of the root of this remarkable integrity and truthfulness of his toward men. For we live in times when it is often alleged that religion and morality have no vital connection with each other, and that there may be found an "independent morality" altogether separate from religious profession. Let it be granted that this

divorce from morality may be true of religions of an external character, where Divine service is supposed to consist of ritual observances and bodily attitudes and attendances, performed in strict accordance with a very rigid rule. Wherever such performances are looked on as the end of religion, they may be utterly dissociated from morality, and one may be, at one and the same time, strictly religious and glaringly immoral. Nay, further, where religion is held to be in the main the acceptance of a system of doctrine, where the reception of the doctrines of grace is regarded as the distinguishing mark of the Christian, and fidelity to these doctrines the most important duty of discipleship, you may again have a religion dissociated from moral life. You may find men who glory in the doctrine of justification by faith and look with infinite pity on those who are vainly seeking to be accepted by their works, and who deem themselves very safe from punishment because of the doctrine they hold, but who have no right sense of the intrinsic evil of sin, and who are neither honest, nor truthful, nor worthy of trust in the common relations of life. But wherever religion is spiritual and penetrating, wherever sin is seen in its true character, wherever men feel the curse and pollution of sin in their hearts and lives, another spirit rules. The great desire now is to be delivered from sin, not merely in its punishment, but in its pollution and power. The end of religion is to establish a gracious relation through Jesus Christ between the sinner and God, whereby not only shall God's favour be restored, but the soul shall be renewed after God's image, and the rule of life shall be to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Now we say, You cannot have *such* a religion without moral reformation. And, on the other hand, you cannot rely on

moral reformation being accomplished without a religion like this. But alas! the love of sinful things is very deeply grained in the fallen nature of man.

Godlessness and selfishness are frightfully powerful in unregenerate hearts. The will of God is a terrible rule of life to the natural man—a rule against which he rebels as unreasonable, impracticable, terrible. How then are men brought to pay supreme and constant regard to that will? How was Samuel brought to do this, and how are men led to do it now? In both cases, it is through the influence of gracious, Divine love. Samuel was a member of a nation that God had chosen as His own, that God had redeemed from bondage, that God dwelt among, protected, restored, guided, and blessed beyond all example. The heart of Samuel was moved by God's goodness to the nation. More than that, Samuel personally had been the object of God's redeeming love; and though the hundred-and-third Psalm was not yet written, he could doubtless say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies, who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." It is the same gracious Divine action, the same experience of redeeming grace and mercy, that under the Christian dispensation draws men's hearts to the will of God; only a new light has been thrown on these Divine qualities by the Cross of Christ. The forgiving grace and love of God have been placed in a new setting, and when it is felt that God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, a new

sense of His infinite kindness takes possession of the soul. Little truly does any one know of religion, in the true sense of the term, who has not got this view of God in Christ, and has not felt his obligations to the Son of God, who loved him and gave Himself for him. And when this experience comes to be known, it becomes the delight of the soul to do the will of God. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

CHAPTER XVII.

SAMUEL'S DEALINGS WITH THE PEOPLE.

1 Samuel xii. 6—25.

2. HAVING vindicated himself (in the first five verses of this chapter), Samuel now proceeds to his second point, and takes the people in hand. But before proceeding to close quarters with them, he gives a brief review of the history of the nation, in order to bring out the precise relation in which they stood to God, and the duty resulting from that relation (vers. 6-12).

First, he brings out the fundamental fact of their history. Its grand feature was this: "It is the Lord who advanced Moses and Aaron, and brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt." The fact was as indisputable as it was glorious. How would Moses ever have been induced to undertake the task of deliverance from Egypt if the Lord had not sent him? Was he not most unwilling to leave the wilderness and return to Egypt? What could Aaron have done for them if the Lord had not guided and anointed him? How could the people have found an excuse for leaving Egypt even for a day if God had not required them? How could Pharaoh have been induced to let them go, when even the first nine plagues only hardened his heart, or how could they have escaped from him and his army, had the Lord not divided the sea that His ransomed might pass over? The fact could not be

disputed—their existence as a people and their settlement in Canaan were due to the special mercy of the Lord. If ever a nation owed everything to the power above, Israel owed everything to Jehovah. No distinction could even approach this in its singular glory.

And yet there was a want of cordiality on the part of the people in acknowledging it. They were partly at least blind to its surpassing lustre. The truth is, they did not like all the duties and responsibility which it involved. It is the highest honour of a son to have a godly father, upright, earnest, consistent in serving God. Yet many a son does not realise this, and sometimes in his secret heart he wishes that his father were just a little more like the men of the world. It is the brightest chapter in the history of a nation that records its struggles for God's honour and man's liberty; yet there are many who have no regard for these struggles, but denounce their champions as ruffians and fanatics. Close connection with God is not, in the eyes of the world, the glorious thing that it is in reality. How strange that this should be so! "O righteous Father," exclaimed Christ in His intercessory prayer, "the world hath not known Thee." He was distressed at the world's blindness to the excellence of God. "How strange it is," Richard Baxter says in substance somewhere, "that men can see beauty in so many things—in the flowers, in the sky, in the sun—and yet be blind to the highest beauty of all, the fountain and essence of all beauty, the beauty of the Lord!" Never rest, my friends, so long as this is true of you. Is not the very fact that to you God, even when revealed in Jesus Christ, may be like a root out of a dry ground, having no form or comeliness or any beauty wherefore you should desire Him—is not that, if it be a fact, alike alarming

and appalling? Make it your prayer that He who commanded the light to shine out of darkness would shine in your heart, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Having emphatically laid down the fundamental fact in the history of Israel, Samuel next proceeds to reason upon it. The reasoning rests on two classes of facts: the first, that whenever the people forsook God they had been brought into trouble; the second, that whenever they repented and cried to God He delivered them out of their trouble. The prophet refers to several instances of both, but not exhaustively, not so as to embrace every instance. Among those into whose hand God gave them were Sisera, the Philistines, and the Moabites; among those raised up to deliver them when they cried to the Lord were Jerubbaal, and Bedan, and Jephthah, and Samuel. The name Bedan does not occur in the history, and as the Hebrew letters that form the word are very similar to those which form Barak, it has been supposed, and I think with reason, that the word Bedan is just a clerical mistake for Barak. The use the prophet makes of both classes of facts is to show how directly God was concerned in what befell the nation. The whole course of their history under the judges had shown that to forsake God and worship idols was to bring on the nation disaster and misery; to return to God and restore His worship was to secure abundant prosperity and blessing. This had been made as certain by past events as it was certain that to close the shutters in an apartment was to plunge it into darkness, and that to open them was to restore light. Cause and effect had been made so very plain that any child might see how the matter stood.

Now, what was it that had recently occurred?

They had had trouble from the Ammonites. At ver. 11 the prophet indicates—what is not stated before—that this trouble with the Ammonites had been connected with their coming to him to ask a king. Evidently, the siege of Jabesh-Gilead was not the first offensive act the Ammonites had committed. They had no doubt been irritating the tribes on the other side of Jordan in many ways before they proceeded to attack that city. And if their attack was at all like that which took place in the days of Jephthah, it must have been very serious and highly threatening. (See Judges x. 8, 9.) Now, from what Samuel says here, it would appear that this annoyance from the Ammonites was the immediate occasion of the people wishing to have a king. Here let us observe what their natural course would have been, in accordance with former precedent. It would have been to cry to the Lord to deliver them from the Ammonites. As they had cried for deliverance when the Ammonites for eighteen years vexed and oppressed all the tribes settled on the east side of Jordan, and when they even passed over Jordan to fight against Judah and Benjamin and Ephraim, and the Lord raised up Jephthah, so ought they to have cried to the Lord at this time, and He would have given them a deliverer. But instead of that they asked Samuel to give them a king, that he might deliver them. You see from this what cause Samuel had to charge them with rejecting God for their King. You see at the same time how much forbearance God exercised in allowing Samuel to grant their request. God virtually said, "I will graciously give up My plan and accommodate myself to theirs. I will give up the plan of raising up a special deliverer in special danger, and will let their king be their deliverer. If they and their

king are faithful to My covenant, I will give the same mercies to them as they would have received had things remained as they were. It will still be true, as I promised to Abraham, that I will be their God and they shall be My people."

3. This is the third thing that Samuel is specially concerned to press on the people; and this he does in the remaining verses (vers. 13-25). They were to remember that their having a king in no sense and in no degree exempted them from their moral and spiritual obligations to God. It did not give them one atom more liberty either in the matter of worship, or in those weightier matters of the law—justice, mercy, and truth. It did not make it one iota less sinful to erect altars to Baal and Ashtaroth, or to join with any of their neighbours in religious festivities in honour of these gods. "If ye will fear the Lord, and serve Him, and obey His voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the Lord your God; but if ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall the hand of the Lord be against you, as it was against your fathers."

There is nothing very similar to this in the circumstances in which we are placed. And yet it is often needful to remind even Christian people of this great truth: that no change of outward circumstances can ever bring with it a relaxation of moral duty, or make that lawful for us which in its own nature is wrong. Nothing of moral quality can be right for us on shipboard which is wrong for us on dry land. Nothing can be allowable in India which could not be thought of in England or Scotland. The law of the Sabbath is not

more elastic on the continent of Europe than it is at home. There is no such thing as a geographical religion or a geographical Christianity. Burke used to say, looking to the humane spirit that Englishmen showed at home and the oppressive treatment they were often guilty of to the natives of other countries, that the humanity of England was a thing of points and parallels. But a local humanity is no humanity. Those who act as if it were, make public opinion their god, instead of the eternal Jehovah. They virtually say that what public opinion does not allow in England is wrong in England, and must be avoided. If public opinion allows it on the continent of Europe, or in India, or in Africa, it may be done. Is this not dethroning God, and abrogating His immutable law? If God be our King, His will must be our one unfailing rule of life and duty wherever we are. Truly, there is little recognition of a mutable public opinion affecting the quality of our actions, in that sublime psalm that brings out so powerfully the omniscience of God,—the hundred and thirty-ninth, "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit, and whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me and Thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee, but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee."

It was Samuel's purpose, then, to press on the people that the change involved in having a king brought no change as to their duty of invariable allegiance to God. The lessons of history had been

clear enough; but they were always a dull-sighted people, and not easily impressed except by what was palpable and even sensational. For this reason Samuel determined to impress the lesson on them in another way. He would show them there and then, under their very eyes, what agencies of destruction God held in His hand, and how easily He could bring these to bear on them and on their property. "Is it not wheat harvest to-day?" You are gathering or about to gather that important crop, and it is of vital importance that the weather be still and calm. But I will pray the Lord, and He shall send thunder and rain, and you will see how easy it is for Him in one hour to ruin the crop which you have been nursing so carefully for months back. "So Samuel called unto the Lord; and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel. And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God that we die not; for we have added unto all our sins this evil: to ask us a king." It was an impressive proof how completely they were in God's hands. What earthly thing could any of them or all of them do to ward off that agent of destruction from their crops? There were they, a great army, with sword and spear, young, strong, and valiant, yet they could not arrest in its fall one drop of rain, nor alter the course of one puff of wind, nor extinguish the blaze of one tongue of fire. Oh, what folly it was to offer an affront to the great God, who had such complete control over "fire and hail, snow and vapours, stormy wind fulfilling His word"! What blindness to think they could in any respect be better with another king!

Thus it is that in their times of trial God's people in all ages have been brought to feel their entire depend-

ence on Him. In days of flowing prosperity, we have little sense of that dependence. As the Psalmist puts it in the thirtieth Psalm: "In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved." When all goes well with us, we expect the same prosperity to continue; it seems stereotyped, the fixed and permanent condition of things. When the days run smoothly, "involving happy months, and these as happy years," all seems certain to continue. But a change comes over our life. Ill-health fastens on us; death invades our circle; relatives bring us into deep waters; our means of living fail; we are plunged into a very wilderness of woe. How falsely we judged when we thought that it was by its own inherent stability our mountain stood strong! No, no; it was solely the result of God's favour, for all our springs are in Him; the moment He hides His face we are most grievously troubled. Sad but salutary experience! Well for you, my afflicted friend, if it burns into your very soul the conviction that every blessing in life depends on God's favour, and that to offend God is to ruin all!

But now, the humble and contrite spirit having been shown by the people, see how Samuel hastens to comfort and reassure them. Now that they have begun to fear, he can say to them, "Fear not." Now that they have shown themselves alive to the evils of God's displeasure, they are assured that there is a clear way of escape from these evils. "Turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart." If God be terrible as an enemy, He is glorious as a friend. No doubt you offered a slight to Him when you sought another king. But it is just a proof of His wonderful goodness that, though you have done this, He does not cast you off. He will be as near to you as

ever He was if you are only faithful to Him. He will still deliver you from your enemies when you call upon Him. For His name and His memorial are still the same: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and in truth, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty."

Samuel, moreover, reminds them that it was not they that had chosen God; it was God that had chosen them. "The Lord will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it hath pleased the Lord to make you His people." This was a great ground of comfort for Israel. The eternal God had chosen them and made them His people for great purposes of His own. It was involved in this very choice and purpose of God that He would keep His hand on them, and preserve them from all such calamities as would prevent them from fulfilling His purpose. Fickle and changeable, they might easily be induced to break away from Him; but, strong and unchangeable, He could never be induced to abandon His purpose in them. And if this was a comfort to Israel then, there is a corresponding comfort to the spiritual Israel now. If my heart is in any measure turned to God, to value His favour and seek to do His will, it is God that has effected the change. And this shows that God has a purpose with me. Till that purpose is accomplished, He cannot leave me. He will correct me when I sin, He will recover me when I stray, He will heal me when I am sick, He will strengthen me when I am weak; "I am confident of this very thing: that He which hath begun a good work in me will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ."

Once more, in answer to the people's request that he

would intercede for them, Samuel is very earnest. "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." The great emphasis with which he says this shows how much his heart is in it. "What should I do, if I had not the privilege of intercessory prayer for you?" There is a wonderful revelation of love to the people here. They are dear to him as his children are dear to a Christian parent, and he feels for them as warmly as he feels for himself. There is a wonderful deepening of interest and affection when men's relation to God is realized. The warmest heart as yet unregenerate cannot feel for others as the spiritual heart must do when it takes in all the possibilities of the spiritual state—all that is involved in the favour or in the wrath of the infinite God, in the predominance of sin or of grace in the heart, and in the prospect of an eternity of woe on the one hand or of glory, honour, and heavenly bliss on the other. How is it possible for one to have all these possibilities full in one's view and not desire the eternal welfare of loved ones with an intensity unknown to others? We know from experience how hard it is to get them to do right. Even one's own children seem sometimes to baffle every art and endeavour of love, and go off, in spite of everything, to the ways of the world. Entreaty and remonstrance are apparently in vain. The more one pleads, the less perhaps are one's pleas regarded. One resource remains—intercessory prayer. It is the only method to which one may resort with full assurance of its ultimate efficacy for attaining the dearest object of one's heart. Does the thought of giving up intercessory prayer come to one from any quarter? No wonder if the insinuation is met by a deep, earnest "God forbid"!

"I bless God," said Mr. Flavel, one of the best and sweetest of the old Puritan divines, on the death of his father—"I bless God for a religious and tender father, who often poured out his soul to God for me; and this stock of prayers I esteem the fairest inheritance on earth." How many a man has been deeply impressed even by the very thought that some one was praying for him! "Is it not strange," he has said to himself, "that he should pray for me far more than I pray for myself? What can induce him to take such an interest in me?" Every Christian ought to think much of intercessory prayer, and practise it greatly. It is doubly blessed: blessed to him who prays and blessed to those for whom he prays. Nothing is better fitted to enlarge and warm the heart than intercessory prayer. To present to God in succession, one after another, our family and our friends, remembering all their wants, sorrows, trials, and temptations; to bear before Him the interests of this struggling Church and that in various parts of the world, this interesting mission and that noble cause; to make mention of those who are waging the battles of temperance, of purity, of freedom, of Christianity itself, in the midst of difficulty, obloquy, and opposition; to gather together all the sick and sorrowing, all the fatherless and widows, all the bereaved and dying, of one's acquaintance, and ask God to bless them; to think of all the children of one's acquaintance in the bright springtide of life, of all the young men and young women arrived or arriving at the critical moment of decision as to the character of their life, and implore God to guide them—O brethren, this is good for one's self; it enlarges one's own heart; it helps one's self in prayer! And then what a blessing it is for those prayed for! Who can estimate the amount of spiritual

blessing that has been sent down on this earth in answer to the fervent intercessions of the faithful? Think how Moses interceded for the whole nation after the golden calf, and it was spared. Think how Daniel interceded for his companions in Babylon, and the secret was revealed to him. Think how Elijah interceded for the widow, and her son was restored to life. Think how Paul constantly interceded for all his Churches, and how their growth and spiritual prosperity evinced that his prayer was not in vain. God forbid that any Christian should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for the Church which He hath purchased with His own blood. And while we pray for the Church, let us not forget the world that lieth in wickedness. For of all for whom the desires of the faithful should go up to heaven, surely the most necessitous are those who have as yet no value for heavenly blessings. What duty can be more binding on us than to "pray for her that prays not for herself"?

CHAPTER XVIII.

SAUL AND SAMUEL AT GILGAL.

1 SAMUEL xiii.

THE first thing that claims our attention in connection with this chapter is the question of dates involved in the first verse. In the Authorized Version we read, "Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, Saul chose him three thousand men." This rendering of the original is now quite given up. The form of expression is the same as that which so often tells us the age of a king at the beginning of his reign and the length of his reign. The Revised Version is in close, but not in strict, accord with the Hebrew. It runs, "Saul was *thirty* years old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years over Israel." A marginal note of the Revised Version says, "The Hebrew text has, '*Saul was a year old.*' The whole verse is omitted in the unrevised Septuagint, but in a later recension the number *thirty* is inserted." There can be no doubt that something has been dropped out of the Hebrew text. Literally translated, it would run, "Saul was a year old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years over Israel." A figure seems to have dropped out after "Saul was" and another after "he reigned." A blot of some kind may have effaced these figures in the

original manuscript, and the copyist not knowing what they were, may have left them blank. The Septuagint conjecture of "thirty" as Saul's age is not very felicitous, for at the beginning of Saul's reign his son Jonathan was old enough to distinguish himself in the war. Judging from probabilities, we should say that the original may have run thus: "Saul was forty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty and two years over Israel." This would make the length of Saul's reign to correspond with the duration of Saul's dynasty as given in Acts xiii. 21. There it is said that God gave to the people Saul "by the space of forty years." If to the thirty-two years which we suppose to have been the actual length of Saul's reign we add seven and a half, during which his son Ishbosheth reigned, we get in round numbers as the duration of his dynasty forty years. This would make Saul about seventy-two at the time of his death.

The narrative in this chapter appears to be in immediate connection with that of the last. The bulk of the army had gone from Jabesh-Gilead to Gilgal, and there, under Samuel, they had renewed the kingdom. There they had listened to Samuel's appeal, and there the thunderstorm had taken place that helped so well to rivet the prophet's lessons. Therefore the bulk of the army was disbanded, but two thousand men were kept with Saul at Michmash and near Bethel, and one thousand with Jonathan at Gibeah. These were necessary to be some restraint on the Philistines, who were strong in the neighbourhood and eager to inflict every possible annoyance on the Israelites. Saul, however, does not seem to have felt himself in a position to take any active steps against them.

But though Saul was inactive, Jonathan did not

slumber. Though very young, probably under twenty, he had already been considered worthy of an important command, and now, by successfully attacking a garrison of the Philistines in Geba, he showed that he was worthy of the confidence that had been placed in him. It is interesting to mark in Jonathan that dash and daring which was afterwards so conspicuous in David, and the display of which on the part of David drew Jonathan's heart to him so warmly. The news of the exploit of Jonathan soon circulated among the Philistines, and would naturally kindle the desire to retaliate. Saul would see at once that, as the result of this, the Philistines would come upon them in greater force than ever; and it was to meet this expected attack that he called for a muster of his people. Gilgal was the place of rendezvous, deep down in the Jordan valley; for the higher part of the country was so dominated by the enemy that no muster could take place there.

So it seemed as if the brilliant achievement of Jonathan was going to prove a curse rather than a blessing. In all kinds of warfare, we must be prepared for such turns in the order of events. When one side shows a great increase of activity, the other does the same. When one achieves an advantage, the other rouses itself to restore the balance. It has often happened in times of religious darkness that the bold attitude of some fearless reformer has roused the enemy to activity and ferocity, and thus brought to his brethren worse treatment than before. But such reverses are only temporary, and the cause of truth gains on the whole by the successful skirmishes of its pioneers. Many persons, when they see the activity and boldness which the forces of evil manifest in our day, are led to conclude that our times are sadly

degenerate; they forget that the activity of evil is the proof and the result of the vitality and activity of good. No doubt there were faint-hearted persons in the host of Israel who would bring hard accusations against Jonathan for disturbing the equilibrium between Israel and the Philistines. They would shake their heads and utter solemn truisms on the rashness of youth, and would ask if it was not a shame to entrust a stripling with such power and responsibility. But Jonathan's stroke was the beginning of a movement which might have ended in the final expulsion of the Philistines from the territories of Israel if Saul had not acted foolishly at Gilgal. In this case, it was not the young man, but the old, that was rash and reckless. Jonathan had acted with courage and vigour, probably also with faith; it was Saul that brought disturbance and disaster to the host.

The dreaded invasion of the Philistines was not long of taking place. The force which they brought together is stated so high, that in the number of the chariots some commentators have suspected an error of the copyist, 30,000 for 3,000, an error easily accounted for, as the extra cipher would be represented by a slight mark over the Hebrew letter. But, be this as it may, the invading host was of prodigiously large dimensions. It was so large as to spread a thorough panic through the whole community of Israel, for the people "hid themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits." Not content with such protection, some of them crossed the Jordan, and took refuge in Gilead and in Dan, not far from Jabesh-Gilead, where another enemy had been so signally defeated. Saul had remained in Gilgal, where he was followed by a host of people, not in any degree impressed by

what God had done for them at Jabesh-Gilead, not trying to rally their courage by the thought that God was still their King and Defender, but full of that abject fear which utterly unnerves both mind and body, and prepares the way for complete disaster. How utterly prostrated and helpless the people were is apparent from that very graphic picture of their condition which we find towards the end of the chapter: "There was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel; for the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make to themselves swords or spears; but all the Israelites went down to the Philistines to sharpen every man his share, and his coulter, and his axe, and his mattock." It requires little effort of imagination to see that the condition of the Israelites was, humanly speaking, utterly desperate. An enormous array of warriors like the Philistines, equipped with all the weapons of war, and confident in their prowess and their power, pouring upon a land where the defenders had not even swords nor spears, but only clubs and stones and such-like rude resources for the purposes of conflict, presented a scene the issue of which could not have been doubtful on all human calculations.

But surely the case was not a whit more desperate than that of their forefathers had been, with the sea before them, the mountains on either side, and the Egyptian army, in all its completeness of equipment, hastening to fall upon their rear. Yet out of that terrible situation their Divine King had delivered them, and a few hours after, they were all jubilant and triumphant, singing to the Lord who had triumphed gloriously, and had cast the horse and his rider into the sea. And no one can fail to see that the very gravity of the situation at the present time ought to have given birth

to a repetition of that spirit of faith and prayer which had animated Moses, as it afterwards animated Deborah, and Gideon, and many more, and through which deliverance had come. On every ground the duty incumbent on Saul at this time was to show the most complete deference to the will of God and the most unreserved desire to enjoy His countenance and guidance. First, the magnitude of the danger, the utter disproportion between the strength of the defending people and that of the invading host, was fitted to throw him on God. Second, the fact, so solemnly and earnestly urged by Samuel, that, notwithstanding the sin committed by the people in demanding a king, God was willing to defend and rule His people as of old, *if only they had due regard to Him and His covenant*, should have made Saul doubly careful to act at this crisis in every particular in the most rigid compliance with God's will. Thirdly, the circumstance, which he himself had so well emphasized, that the recent victory at Jabesh-Gilead was a victory obtained from God, should have led him direct to God, to implore a similar interposition of His power in this new and still more overwhelming danger. If only Saul had been a true man, a man of faith and prayer, he would have risen to the height of the occasion at this terrible crisis, and a deliverance as glorious as that which Gideon obtained over the Midianites would have signalized his efforts. It was a most testing moment in his history. The whole fortunes of his kingdom seemed to depend on his choice. *There* was God, ready to come to his help if His help had been properly asked. *There* were the Philistines, ready to swallow them up if no sufficient force could be mustered against them. But weighed in the balances, Saul was found wanting. He did not honour God; he did not act as knowing that

all depended on Him. And this want of his would have involved the terrible humiliation and even ruin of the nation if Jonathan had not been of a different temper from his father, if Jonathan had not achieved the deliverance which would not have come by Saul.

Let us now examine carefully how Saul acted on the occasion, all the more carefully because, at first sight, many have the impression that he was justified in what he did, and consequently that the punishment announced by Samuel was far too severe.

It appears that Samuel had instructed Saul to wait seven days for him at Gilgal, in order that steps might be properly taken for securing the guidance and help of God. There is some obscurity in the narrative here, arising from the fact that it was on the first occasion of their meeting that we read how Samuel directed Saul to wait seven days for him at Gilgal, till he should come to offer burnt-offerings and to show him what he was to do (chap. x. 8). We can hardly suppose, however, that this first direction, given by Samuel, was not implemented at an earlier time. It looks as if Samuel had repeated the instruction to Saul with reference to the circumstances of the Philistine invasion. But, be this as it may, it is perfectly clear from the narrative that Saul was under instructions to wait seven days at Gilgal, at the end, if not before the end, of which time Samuel promised to come to him. This was a distinct instruction from Samuel, God's known and recognized prophet, acting in God's name and with a view to the obtaining of God's countenance and guidance in the awful crisis of the nation. The seven days had come to an end, and Samuel had not appeared. Saul determined that he would wait no longer. "Saul said,

Bring hither a burnt-offering to me, and peace-offerings. And he offered the burnt-offering."

Now, it has been supposed by some that Saul's offence lay in his taking on him the functions of priest, and doing that which it was not lawful for any but priests to do. But it does not appear that this was his offence. A king is often said to do things which in reality are done by his ministers and others. All that is necessarily involved in the narrative is, that the king caused the priests to offer the burnt-offering. For even Samuel had no authority personally to offer sacrifices, and had he been present, the priests would have officiated all the same.

The real offence of Saul was that he disregarded the absence of God's prophet and representative, of the man who had all along been the mediator between God and the king and between God and the people. And this was no secondary matter. If Saul had had a real conviction that all depended at this moment on his getting God's help, he would not have disregarded an instruction received from God's servant, and he would not have acted as if Samuel's presence was of no moment. The significant thing in Saul's state of mind, as disclosed by his act, was that he was not really bent on complying with the will of God. God was not a reality to Saul. The thought of God just loomed vaguely before his mind as a power to be considered, but not as the power on whom everything depended. What he thought about God was, that a burnt-offering must be offered up to propitiate Him, to prevent Him from obstructing the enterprise, but he did not think of Him as the Being who alone could give it success. It was substantially the carnal mind's view of God. It says, no doubt there is a God, and He has

an influence on things here below; and to keep Him from thwarting us, we must perform certain services which seem to please Him. But what a pitiful view it is of God! As if the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity could be induced to bestow or to withhold His favour simply by the slaughter of an animal, or by some similar rite!

But this was Saul's idea. "The sacrifice must be offered; the rite must be gone through. This piece of outward homage must be paid to the power above, but the way of doing it is of little moment. It is a sacred form, no more. I am sorry not to have Samuel present, but the fault is not mine. He was to be here, and he has not come. And now these frightened people are stealing away from me, and if I wait longer, I may be left without followers. Priests, bring the animal and offer the sacrifice, and let us away to the war!"

How different would have been the acting of a man that honoured God and felt that in His favour was life! How solemnized he would have been, how concerned for his own past neglect of God, and the neglect of his people! The presence of God's prophet would have been counted at once a necessity and a privilege. How deeply, in his sense of sin, would he have entered into the meaning of the burnt-offering! How earnestly he would have pleaded for God's favour, countenance, and blessing! If Jacob could not let the angel go at Peniel unless he blessed him, neither would Saul have parted from God at Gilgal without some assurance of help. "If Thy presence go not with me," he would have said, "carry us not up hence." Alas, we find nothing of all this! The servant of God is not waited for; the form is gone through, and Saul is off to his work. And this is the doing of the man who

has been called to be king of Israel, and who has been solemnly warned that God alone is Israel's defence, and that to offend God is to court ruin!

When Samuel came, Saul was ready with a plausible excuse. On the ground of expediency, he vindicated his procedure. He could not deny that he had broken his promise (it was a virtual promise) to wait for Samuel, but there were reasons exceedingly strong to justify him in doing so. Samuel had not come. The people were scattered from him. The Philistines were concentrating at Michmash, and might have come down and fallen upon him at Gilgal. All very true, but not one of them by itself, nor all of them together, a real vindication of what he had done. Samuel, he might be sure, would not be an hour longer than he could help. There were far more people left to him than Gideon's band, and the God that gave the victory to the three hundred would not have let him suffer for want of men. The Philistines might have been discomfited by God's tempest on the way to Gilgal, as they were discomfited before, on the way to Mizpeh. O Saul, distrust of God has been at the bottom of your mind! The faith that animated the heroes of former days has had no control of you. You have walked by sight, not by faith. Had you been faithful now, and honoured God, and waited till His servant sent you off with his benediction, prosperity would have attended you, and your family would have been permanently settled in the throne. But now your kingdom shall not continue. Personally, you may continue to be king for many years to come; but the penalty which God affixes to this act of unbelief, formality, and presumption is, that no line of kings shall spring from your loins. The Lord hath sought Him a man after His own heart, and

the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over His people.

What a solemn and impressive condemnation have we here, my friends, of that far too common practice—deserting principle to serve expediency. I don't like to tell a lie, some one may say, but if I had not done so, I should have lost my situation. I dislike common work on the Sabbath day, but if I did not do it, I could not live. I don't think it right to go to Sunday parties or to play games on Sunday, but I was invited by this or that great person to do it, and I could not refuse him. I ought not to adulterate my goods, and I ought not to give false statements of their value, but every one in my business does it, and I cannot be singular. What do these vindications amount to, but just a confession that from motives of expediency God's commandment may be set aside? These excuses just come to this: It was better for me to offend God and gain a slight benefit, than it would have been to lose the benefit and please God. It is a great deal to lose a small profit in business, or a small pleasure in social life, or a small honour from a fellow-man; but it is little or nothing to displease God, it is little or nothing to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath. Alas for the practical unbelief that lies at the bottom of all this! It is the doing of the fool who hath said in his heart, There is no God. Look at this history of Saul. See what befell him for preferring expediency to principle. Know that the same condemnation awaits all who walk in his footsteps—all who are not solemnized by that awful, that unanswerable, question, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

Great offence has often been taken at the character here ascribed to the man who was to fill the throne

after Saul—"The Lord hath sought Him a man after His own heart." Was David, the adulterer, the traitor, the murderer, a man after God's own heart? But surely it is not meant to be affirmed that David was such a man in every aspect, in every particular. The point on which the emphasis should rest must surely be that David was such a man in that feature in which Saul was so wanting. And undoubtedly this was eminently true of him. That which stood out most fully in the public character of David was the honour which he paid to God, the constancy with which he consulted His will, the prevailing desire he had to rule the kingdom in His fear and for His glory. If God was but a form to Saul, He was an intense reality to David. If Saul could not get it into his mind that he ought to rule for God, David could not have got it out of his mind if he had tried. That David's character was deformed in many ways cannot be denied; he had not only infirmities, but tumours, blotches, defilements, most distressing to behold; but in this one thing he left an example to all of us, and especially to rulers, which it would be well for all of us to ponder deeply: that the whole business of government is to be carried on in the spirit of regard to the will of God; that the welfare of the people is ever to be consulted in preference to the interests of the prince; that for nations, as for individuals, God's favour is life, and His frown ruin.

CHAPTER XIX.

JONATHAN'S EXPLOIT AT MICHMASH.

1 Samuel xiv. 1—23.

IT has sometimes been objected to the representation occurring at the end of the thirteenth chapter of the utter want of arms among the Hebrews at this time that it is inconsistent with the narrative of the eleventh. If it be true, as stated there, that the Israelites gained a great victory over the Ammonites, they must have had arms to accomplish that; and, moreover, the victory itself must have put them in possession of the arms of the Ammonites. The answer to this is, that the invasion of the Philistines subsequent to this in such overwhelming numbers seems to have been the cause of the miserable plight to which the Hebrews were reduced, and of the loss of their arms.

Whether we are to take the statement as quite literal that in the day of battle there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people save Saul or Jonathan, or whether we are to regard this as just an Oriental way of saying that these were the only two who had a thorough equipment of arms, it is plain enough that the condition of the Hebrew troops was very wretched. That in their circumstances a feeling of despondency should have fallen on all save the few who walked by faith, need not excite any surprise.

The position of the two armies is not difficult to understand. Several miles to the north of Jerusalem, a valley, now named Wady Suweinet, runs from west to east, from the central plateau of Palestine down towards the valley of the Jordan. The name Mûkmas, still preserved, shows the situation of the place which was then occupied by the garrison of the Philistines. Near to that place, Captain Conder* believes that he has found the very rocks where the exploit of Jonathan occurred. On either side of the valley there rises a perpendicular crag, the northern one, called in Scripture Bozez, being extremely steep and difficult of ascent. "It seems just possible that Jonathan, with immense labour, might have climbed up on his hands and his feet, and his armour-bearer after him."

It is evident that Saul had no thought at this time of making any attack on the Philistines. How could he, with soldiers so poorly armed and so little to encourage them? Samuel does not appear to have been with him. But in his company was a priest, Ahiah, the son of Ahitub, grandson of Eli, perhaps the same as Ahimelech, afterwards introduced. Saul still adhered to the forms of religion; but he had too much resemblance to the Church of Sardis—"Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."

The position of the army of Israel with reference to the Philistines seems to have been very similar to what it was afterwards when Goliath defied the army of the living God. The Israelites could only look on, in helpless inactivity. But just as the youthful spirit of David was afterwards roused in these circumstances to exertion, so on the present occasion was the youthful

* "Tent Work in Palestine."

spirit of Jonathan. It was not the first time that he had attacked the garrison of the Philistines. (See xiii. 3.) But what he did on the former occasion seems to have been under more equal conditions than the seemingly desperate enterprise to which he betook himself now. A project of unprecedented daring came into his mind. He took counsel with no one about it. He breathed nothing of it to his father. A single confidant and companion was all that he thought of—his armour-bearer, or aide-de-camp. And even him he did not so much consult as attach. "Come," said he, "and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the Lord will work for us; for there is no restraint by the Lord to save by many or by few." No words are needed to show the daring character of this project. The physical effort to climb on hands and feet up a precipitous rock was itself most difficult and perilous, possible only to boys, light and lithe of form, and well accustomed to it; and if the garrison observed them and chose to oppose them, a single stone hurled from above would stretch them, crushed and helpless, on the valley below. But suppose they succeeded, what were a couple of young men to do when confronted with a whole garrison? Or even if the garrison should be overpowered, how were they to deal with the Philistine host, that lay encamped at no great distance, or at most were scattered here and there over the country, and would soon assemble? In every point of view save one, the enterprise seemed utterly desperate. But that exception was a very important one. The one point of view in which there was the faintest possibility of success was, that the Lord God might favour the enterprise. The God of their fathers might work for them, and if He did so, there was no restraint with Him

to work by many or by few. Had He not worked by Ehud alone to deliver their fathers from the Moabites? Had he not worked by Shamgar alone, when with his ox goad he slew six hundred Philistines? Had he not worked by Samson alone in all his wonderful exploits? Might he not work that day by Jonathan and his armour-bearer, and, after all, only produce a new chapter in that history which had already shown so many wonderful interpositions? Jonathan's mind was possessed by the idea. After all, if he failed, he could but lose his life. And was not that worth risking when success, if it were vouchsafed, might rescue his country from degradation and destruction, and fill the despairing hearts of his countrymen with emotions of joy and triumph like those which animated their fathers when on the shores of Sinai they beheld the horse and his rider cast into the sea?

It is this working of faith that must be regarded as the most characteristic feature of the attempt of Jonathan. He showed himself one of the noble heroes of faith, not unworthy to be enrolled in the glorious record of the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews. He showed himself pre-eminent for the very quality in which his father had proved deficient. Though the earnest lessons of Samuel had been lost on the father, they had been blessed to the son. The seed that in the one case fell on stony places fell in the other on good ground. While Samuel was doubtless disconsolate at the failure of his work with Saul, he was succeeding right well, unknown perhaps to himself, with the youth that said little but thought much. While in spirit perhaps he was uttering words like Isaiah's, "Then said I, I have laboured in vain; I have spent my strength for nought and in vain," God was using him in a way that might

well have led him to add, "Yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God." And what encouragement is here for every Christian worker! Don't despond when you seem to fail in your first and most direct endeavour. In some quiet but thinking little boy or girl in that family circle, your words are greatly regarded. And just because that young mind sees, and seeing wonders, that father or mother is so little moved by what you say, it is the more impressed. If the father or the mother were manifestly to take the matter up, the child might dismiss it, as no concern of his. But just because father or mother is not taking it up, the child cannot get rid of it. "Yes, there *is* an eternity, and we ought all to be preparing for it. Sin *is* the soul's ruin, and unless we get a Saviour, we are lost. Jesus *did* come into the world to save sinners; must we not go to Him? Yes, we must be born again. Lord Jesus, forgive us, help us, save us!" Thus it is that things hid from the wise and prudent are often revealed to babes; and thus it is that out of the mouth of babes and sucklings God perfects praise.

But Jonathan's faith in God was called to manifest itself in a way very different from that in which the faith of most young persons has to be exercised now. Faith led Jonathan to seize sword and spear, and hurry out to an enterprise in which he could only succeed by risking his own life and destroying the lives of others. We are thus brought face to face with a strange but fascinating development of the religious spirit—military faith. The subject has received a new and wonderful illustration in our day in the character and career of that great Christian hero General Gordon. In the career of Gordon, we see faith contributing an element of power, an element of daring, and an element of

security and success to a soldier, which can come from no other source. No one imagines that without his faith Gordon would have been what he was or could have done what he did. It is little to say that faith raised him high above all ordinary fears, or that it made him ready at any moment to risk, and if need be, to sacrifice his life. It did a great deal more. It gave him a conviction that he was an instrument in God's hands, and that when he was moved to undertake anything as being God's will, he would be carried through all difficulties, enabled to surmount all opposition, and to carry the point in face of the most tremendous odds. And to a great extent the result verified the belief. If Gordon could not be said to work miracles, he achieved results that even miracles could hardly have surpassed. If he failed in the last and greatest hazard of his life, he only showed that after much success one may come to believe too readily in one's inspiration; one may mistake the voice of one's own feeling for the unfailing assurance of God. But that there is a great amount of reality in that faith which hears God calling one as if with audible voice, and goes forth to the most difficult enterprises in the full trust of Divine protection and aid, is surely a lesson which lies on the very surface of the life of Gordon, and such other lives of the same kind as Scripture shows us, as well as the lives of those military heroes of whom we will speak afterwards, whose battle has been not with flesh and blood, but with the ignorance and the vice and the disorder of the world.

One is almost disposed to envy Jonathan, with his whole powers of mind and body knit up to the pitch of firmest and most dauntless resolution, under the inspiration that moved him to this apparently desperate

enterprise. All the world would have rushed to stop him, insanely throwing away his life, without the faintest chance of escape. But a voice spoke firmly in his bosom, —I am not throwing away my life. And Jonathan did not want certain tokens of encouragement. It was something that his armour-bearer neither flinched nor remonstrated. But that was not all. To encourage himself and to encourage his companion, he fixed on what might be considered a token for them to persevere in one alternative, and desist in another. The token was, that if, on observing their attempt, the Philistines in the garrison should defy them, should bid them tarry till they came to them, that would be a sign that they ought to return. But if they should say, "Come up to us," that would be a proof that they ought to persevere. Was this a mere arbitrary token, without anything reasonable underlying it? It does not seem to have been so. In the one case, the words of the Philistines would bear a hostile meaning, denoting that violence would be used against them; in the other case they would denote that the Philistines were prepared to treat them peaceably, under the idea perhaps that they were tired of skulking and, like other Hebrews (ver. 21), wishing to surrender to the enemy. In this latter case, they would be able to make good their position on the rock, and the enemy would not suspect their real errand till they were ready to begin their work. It turned out that their reception was in the latter fashion. Whether in the way of friendly banter or otherwise, the garrison, on perceiving them, invited them to come up, and they would "show them a thing." Greatly encouraged by the sign, they clambered up on hands and feet till they gained the top of the rock. Then, when nothing of the kind was expected, they fell or

the garrison and began to kill. So sudden and unexpected an onslaught threw the garrison into a panic. Their arms perhaps were not at hand, and for anything they knew, a whole host of Hebrews might be hastening after their leaders to complete the work of slaughter. In this way, nearly twenty Philistines fell in half an acre of ground. The rest of the garrison taking to flight seems to have spread a panic among the host. Confusion and terror prevailed on every side. Every man's sword was against his fellow. "There was trembling in the host, in the field, and among the people; the spoilers and the garrison, they also trembled, and the earth quaked; so it was a very great trembling. Whether this implies that the terror and discomfiture of the Philistines was increased by an earthquake, or whether it means that there was so much motion and commotion that the very earth seemed to quake, it is not very easy to decide; but it shows how complete was the discomfiture of the Philistines. Thus wonderfully was Jonathan's faith rewarded, and thus wonderfully, too, was the unbelief of Saul rebuked.

Seen from the watch-tower at Gibeah, the affair was shrouded in mystery. It seemed as if the Philistine troops were retreating, while no force was there to make them retreat. When inquiry was made as to who were absent, Jonathan and his armour-bearer alone were missed. So perplexed was Saul, that, to understand the position of affairs, he had called for Ahiah, who had charge of the ark (the Septuagint reads, "the ephod"), to consult the oracle. But before this could be done, the condition of things became more plain. The noise in the host of the Philistines went on increasing, and when Saul and his soldiers came on the spot, they found the Philistines, in their confusion,

slaughtering one another, amid all the signs of wild discomfiture. Nothing loath, they joined in harassing the retreating foe. And as the situation revealed itself others hastened to take part in the fray. Those Hebrews that had come for protection within the Philistine lines now turned against them, all the more heartily perhaps because, before that, they had had to place their feelings so much under restraint. And the Hebrews that lay hid in caves and thickets and pits, when they saw what was going on, rushed forth to join in the discomfiture of the Philistines. What a contrast to the state of things that very morning! —the Israelites in helpless feebleness, looking with despair on the Philistines as they lay in their stronghold in all the pride of security, and scattered defiant looks and scornful words among their foes; now the Philistine garrison surprised, their camp forsaken, their army scattered, and the only desire or purpose animating the remnant being to escape at the top of their speed from the land of Israel, and find shelter and security in their native country. "So the Lord saved Israel that day; and the battle passed over unto Bethaven."

And thus the faith of Jonathan had a glorious reward. The inspiration of faith vindicated itself, and the noble self-devotion that had plunged into this otherwise desperate enterprise, because there was no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few, led thus to a triumph more speedy and more complete than even Jonathan could have ventured to dream of. None of the judges had wrought a more complete or satisfactory deliverance; and even the crossing of the Red Sea under Moses had not afforded a more glorious evidence than this achievement of Jonathan's of the power of

faith, or given more ample testimony to that principle of the kingdom of God, which our Lord afterwards enunciated, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence unto yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you."

This incident is full of lessons for modern times. First, it shows what wide and important results may come from *individual conviction*. When an individual heart is moved by a strong conviction of duty, it may be that God means through that one man's conviction to move the world. Modesty might lead a man to say, I am but a unit; I have no influence; it will make very little difference what I do with my conviction, whether I cherish it or stifle it. Yet it may be of just world-wide importance that you be faithful to it, and stand by it steadfastly to the end. Did not the Reformation begin through the steadfastness of Luther, the miner's son of Eisleben, to the voice that spoke out so loudly to himself? Did not Carey lay the foundation of the modern mission in India, because he could not get rid of that verse of Scripture, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature"? Did not Livingstone persevere in the most dangerous, the most desperate enterprise of our time, because he could not quench the voice that called him to open up Africa or perish? Or to go back to Scripture times. A Jewish maiden at the court of the great king of Persia becomes the saviour of her whole nation, because she feels that, at the risk of her life, she must speak a word for them to the king. Saul of Tarsus, after his conversion, becomes impressed with the conviction that he must preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, and through his faithfulness to that conviction, he lays the foundation

of the whole European Church. Learn, my friends, every one, from this, never to be faithless to any conviction given to you, though, as far as you know, it is given to you alone. Make very sure that it comes from the God of truth. But don't stifle it, under the notion that you are too weak to bring anything out of it. Don't reason that if it were really from God, it would be given to others too. Test it in every way you can, to determine whether it be right. And if it stands these tests, manfully give effect to it, for it may bear seed that will spread over the globe.

Second, this narrative shows what large results may flow from *individual effort.* The idea may not have occurred for the first time to some one; it may have been derived by him from another; but it has commended itself to him, it has been taken up by him, and worked out by him to results of great magnitude and importance. Pay a visit to the massive buildings and well-ordered institutions of Kaiserswerth, learn its ramifications all over the globe, and see what has come of the individual efforts of Fliedner. Think how many children have been rescued by Dr. Barnardo, how many have been emigrated by Miss Macpherson, how many souls have been impressed by Mr. Moody, how many orphans have been cared for by Mr. Müller, how many stricken ones have been relieved in the institutions of John Bost. It is true, we are not promised that every instance of individual effort will bring any such harvest. It may be that we are to be content with very limited results, and with the encomium bestowed on the woman in the Gospel, "She hath done what she could." But it is also true that none of us can tell what possibilities there are in individual effort. We cannot tell but in our case the emblem of the

seventy-second Psalm may be verified, "There shall be an handful of corn in the earth on the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon, and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth."

Lastly, we may learn from this narrative that the true secret of all spiritual success lies in our seeking to be instruments in God's hands, and in our lending ourselves to Him, to do in us and by us whatever is good in His sight. Thus it was eminently with Jonathan. "It may be that the Lord will work for us; for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few." It was not Jonathan that was to work with some help from God; it was the Lord that was to work by Jonathan. It was not Jonathan's project that was to be carried out; it was the Lord's cause that was to be advanced. Jonathan had no personal ends in this matter. He was willing to give up his life, if the Lord should require it. It is a like consecration in all spiritual service that brings most blessing and success. Men that have nothing of their own to gain are the men who gain most. Men who sacrifice all desire for personal honour are the men who are most highly honoured. Men who make themselves of no reputation are the men who gain the highest reputation. Because Christ emptied Himself, and took on Him the form of a servant, God highly exalted Him and gave Him a name above every name. And those who are like Christ in the mortifying of self become like Christ also in the enjoyment of the reward. Such are the rules of the kingdom of heaven. "He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."

CHAPTER XX.

SAUL'S WILFULNESS.

1 Samuel xiv. 24—52.

THAT Saul was now suffering in character under the influence of the high position and great power to which he had been raised, is only too apparent from what is recorded in these verses. No doubt he pays more respect than he has been used to pay to the forms of religion. He enjoins a fast on his people at a very inconvenient time, under the idea that fasting is a proper religious act. He is concerned for the trespass of the people in eating their food with the blood. He builds the first altar he ever built to God. He consults the oracle before he will commit himself to the enterprise of pursuing the retreating enemy by night. He is concerned to find the oracle dumb, and tries to discover through whose sin it is so. For a ceremonial offence, committed by Jonathan in ignorance, he fancies that God's displeasure has come down on the people, and he not only insists that Jonathan shall die for this offence, but confirms his decision by a solemn oath, sworn in the name of God. All this shows Saul plunging and floundering from one mistake to another, and crowning his blunders by a proposal so outrageous that the indignation of the people arrests his purpose. The idea that the work of the day shall

be wound up by the execution of the youth through whom all the wonderful deliverance has come, and that youth Saul's own son, is one that could never have entered into any but a distempered brain. Reason seems to have begun to stagger on her throne; the sad process has begun which in a more advanced stage left Saul the prey of an evil spirit, and in its last and most humiliating stage drove him to consult with the witch of Endor.

But how are we to explain his increase of religiousness side by side with the advance of moral obliquity and recklessness? Why should he be more careful in the service of God while he becomes more imperious in temper, more stubborn in will, and more regardless of the obligations alike of king and father? The explanation is not difficult to find. The expostulation of Samuel had given him a fright. The announcement that the kingdom would not be continued in his line, and that God had found a worthier man to set over His people Israel, had moved him to the quick. There could be no doubt that Samuel was speaking the truth. Saul had begun to disregard God's will in his public acts, and was now beginning to reap the penalty. He felt that he must pay more attention to God's will. If he was not to lose everything, he must try to be more religious. There is no sign of his feeling penitent in heart. He is not concerned in spirit for his unworthy behaviour toward God. He feels only that his own interests as king are imperilled. It is this selfish motive that makes him determine to be more religious. The fast, and the consultation of the oracle, and the altar, and the oath that Jonathan shall die, have all their origin in this frightened, selfish feeling. And hence, in their very nature and circumstances, his

religious acts are unsuitable and unseemly. In place of making things better by such services, he makes them worse; no peace of God falls like dew on his soul; no joy is diffused throughout his army; discontent reaches a climax when the death of Jonathan is called for; and tranquillity is restored only by the rebellion of the people, rescuing their youthful prince and hero.

Alas, how common has this spirit been in the history of the world! What awful tragedies has it led to, what slaughter of heretics, what frightful excesses disgraceful to kings, what outrages on the common feelings of humanity! Louis XIV. has led a most wicked and profligate life, and he has ever and anon qualms that threaten him with the wrath of God. To avert that wrath, he must be more attentive to his religious duties. He must show more favour to the Church, exalt her dignitaries to greater honour, endow her orders and foundations with greater wealth. But that is not all. He must use all the arms and resources of his kingdom for ridding the Church of her enemies. For twenty years he must harass the Protestants with every kind of vexatious interference, shutting up their churches on frivolous pretexts, compelling them to bury their dead by night, forbidding the singing of psalms in worship, subjecting them to great injustice in their civil capacity, and at last, by the revocation of the edict that gave them toleration, sweeping them from the kingdom in hundreds of thousands, till hardly a Protestant is left behind. What the magnificent monarch did on a large scale, millions of obscurer men have done on a small. It is a sad truth that terror and selfishness have been at the foundation of a great deal of that which passes current as religion. Prayers and penances and vows and charities in cases without number have

been little better than premiums of insurance, designed to save the soul from punishment and pain. Nor have these acts been confined to that Church which, more than any other, has encouraged men to look for saving benefit to the merit of their own works. Many a Protestant, roused by his conscience into a state of fright, has resolved to be more attentive to the duties of religion. He will read his Bible more; he will pray more; he will give more; he will go to church more. Alas, the spring of all this is found in no humiliation for sin before God, no grief at having offended the Father, no humble desire to be renewed in heart and conformed to the image of the First-born! And the consequence is, as in the case of Saul, that things go, not from bad to better, but from bad to worse. There is no peace of God that passeth all understanding; there is no general rectification of the disordered faculties of the soul; there is no token of heavenly blessing, blessing to the man himself and blessing to those about him. A more fiery element seems to come into his temper; a more bitter tone pervades his life. To himself it feels as if there were no good in trying to be better; to the world it appears as if religion put more of the devil into him. But it is all because what he calls religion is no religion; it is the selfish bargain-making spirit, which aims no higher than deliverance from pain; it is not the noble exercise of the soul, prostrated by the sense of guilt, and helpless through consciousness of weakness, lifting up its eyes to the hills whence cometh its help, and rejoicing in the grace that freely pardons all its sin through the blood of Christ, and in the gift of the Holy Spirit that renews and sanctifies the soul.

The first thing that Saul does, in the exercise of this

selfish spirit, is to impose on the people an obligation to fast until the day be over. Any one may see that to compel fasting under such circumstances was alike cruel and unwise. To fast in the solitude of one's chamber, where there is no extra wear and tear of the bodily organs, and therefore no special need for recruiting them, is comparatively safe and easy. But to fast amid the struggles of battle or the hurry of a pursuit; to fast under the burning sun and that strain of the system which brings the keenest thirst; to fast under exertions that rapidly exhaust the thews and sinews, and call for a renewal of their tissues—to fast in circumstances like these involves an amount of suffering which it is not easy to estimate. It was cruel in Saul to impose a fast at such a time, all the more that, being commander-in-chief of the army, it was his duty to do his utmost for the comfort of his soldiers. But it was unwise as well as cruel; with energies impaired by fasting, they could not continue the pursuit nor make the victory so telling. Perhaps he was under the influence of the delusion that the more painful a religious service is, the more is it acceptable to God. That idea of penance does find a place in our natural notions of religion. Saul, as we have seen, grew up with little acquaintance with religious persons and little knowledge of Divine things; and now that perforce he is constrained to attend to them, it is no wonder if he falls into many a serious error. For he probably had no idea of that great rule of God's kingdom, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice."

The folly of Saul's order became apparent when the army came to a wood, where, as is common enough in the country, a stream of wild honey poured out, probably from the trunk of a hollow tree. Stretching out his

rod or spear, Jonathan fixed it in a piece of the comb, which he transferred with his hand to his mouth. Immediately "his eyes were enlightened;" the dull feeling which settles on the eyes amid fatigue and hunger disappeared; and with the return of clear vision to his eyes, there would come a restoration of vigour to his whole frame. When told for the first time of the order which his father had given, he showed no regret at having broken it, but openly expressed his displeasure at its having ever been imposed. "Then said Jonathan, My father hath troubled the land. See, I pray you, how mine eyes have been enlightened, because I tasted a little of this honey. How much more if haply the people had eaten freely to-day of the spoil of their enemies which they found! for had there not been a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?" We must bear in mind that Jonathan was a true man of God. He had set out that morning in his wonderful exploit in the true spirit of faith and full consecration to God. He was in far nearer fellowship with God than his father, and yet so far from approving of the religious order to fast which his father had given, he regards it with displeasure and distrust. Godly men will sometimes be found less outwardly religious than some other men, and will greatly shock them by being so. The godly man has an unction from the Holy One to understand His will; he goes straight to the Lord's business; like our blessed Lord, he finishes the work given him to do: while the merely religious man is often so occupied with his forms, that, like the Pharisees, he neglects the structure for which forms are but the scaffolding; in paying his tithes of mint, anise, and cummin, he omits the weightier matters—justice, mercy, and truth.

But the evil caused by Saul's injudicious fast was not yet over. The obligation to fast lasted only till sunset, and when the day was ended, the people, faint and ravenous, flew upon the spoil—sheep, oxen, and calves—and devoured them on the spot, without taking time or pains to sever the blood from the flesh. To remedy this, Saul had a great stone placed beside him, and ordered the people to bring every man his ox or his sheep, and slay them on that stone, that he might see that the blood was properly drained from the flesh. Then we gather from the marginal reading of ver. 35 that he was proceeding to erect with the stone an altar to God, but that he did not carry this purpose completely into effect, because he determined to continue the pursuit of the Philistines. He saw how much recruited his troops were by their food, and he therefore determined to make a new assault. If it had not been for the unwise order to fast given early in the day, if the people had been at liberty to help themselves to the honey as they passed it, or to such other refreshments as they found in their way, they would have been some hours earlier in this pursuit, and it would have been so much the more effectual.

It would seem, however, that the priest who was in attendance on Saul was somewhat alarmed at the abrupt and rather reckless way in which the king was making his plans and giving his orders. "Let us draw near hither unto God," said he. Counsel was accordingly asked of God whether Saul should go down after the Philistines and whether God would deliver them into the hand of Israel. But to this inquiry no answer was given. It was natural to infer that some sin had separated between God and Saul, some iniquity had caused God to hide His face from him. Here was

a state of things that might well make Saul pause and examine himself. Had he done so in an honest spirit, he could hardly have failed to find out what was wrong. God had given a wonderful deliverance that day through Jonathan. Jonathan was as remarkable for the power of faith as Saul for the want of it. Jonathan had been wonderfully blessed that day, but now that Saul, through the priest, sought to have a communication with God, none was given. Might he not have seen that the real cause of this was that Saul wanted what Jonathan possessed? Besides, was Saul doing justice to Jonathan in taking the enterprise out of his hands? If Jonathan began it, was he not entitled to finish it? Would not Saul have been doing a thing alike generous and just had he stood aside at this time, and called on Jonathan to complete the work of the day? If the king of England was justified in not going to the help of the Black Prince, serious though his danger was, but leaving him to extricate himself, and thus enjoy the whole credit of his valour, might not Saul have let his son end the enterprise which he had so auspiciously begun? In these two facts, in the difference between him and Jonathan as to the spirit of faith, and in the way in which Saul displaced the man whom God so signally countenanced in the morning, the king of Israel might have found the cause of the silence of the oracle. And the right thing for him would have been to confess his error, stand aside, and call on Jonathan to continue the pursuit and, if possible, exterminate the foe.

But Saul took a different course. He had recourse to the lot, to determine the guilty party. Now, it does not appear that even the king of Israel, with the priest at his side, was entitled to resort to the lot to ascertain

the mind of God except in cases where all natural means of discovering it confessedly failed. But we have just seen that in this case the natural means had not failed. Therefore there was no obligation on God to order the lot supernaturally so as to bring out the truth. In point of fact, the process ended so as to point to the very last man in all the army to whom blame was due. It was, as mathematicians say, a *reductio ad absurdum*. It is a proof that an instrument is out of order if it brings out a result positively ludicrous. If near the equator an instrument gives the latitude of the polar circle, it is a proof that it is not working rightly. When the lot pointed to Jonathan, it was a proof that it was not working rightly. Any man might have seen this. And Saul ought to have seen it. And he ought to have confessed that he was entirely out of his reckoning. Frankly and cordially he should have taken the blame on himself, and at once exonerated his noble son.

But Saul was in no mood to take the blame on himself. Nor had he moral sagacity enough to see what an outrage it would be to lay the blame on Jonathan. Assuming that he was guilty, he asked him what he had done. He had done nothing but eat a little honey, not having heard the king's order to abstain. The justification was complete. At worst, it was but a ceremonial offence, but to Jonathan it was not even that. But Saul was too obstinate to admit the plea. By a new oath, he devoted his son to death. Nothing could show more clearly the deplorable state of his mind. In the eye of reason and of justice, Jonathan had committed no offence. He had given signal evidence of the possession in a remarkable degree of the favour of God. He had laid the nation under

inconceivable obligations. All these pleas were for him; and surely in the king's breast a voice might have been heard pleading, Your son, your first-born, "the beginning of your strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power"! Is it possible that this voice was silenced by jealousy, jealousy of his own son, like his after-jealousy of David? What kind of heart could this Saul have had when in such circumstances he could deliberately say, "God do so, and more also, for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan"?

But "the Divine right of kings to govern wrong" is not altogether without check. A temporary revolution saved Jonathan. It was one good effect of excitement. In calmer circumstances, the people might have been too terrified to interfere. But now they were excited—excited by their victory, excited by their fast followed by their meal, and excited by the terror of harm befalling Jonathan. They had far clearer and more correct apprehension of the whole circumstances than the king had. It is especially to be noted that they laid great emphasis on the fact that that day God had worked by Jonathan, and Jonathan had worked with God. This made the great difference between him and Saul. "As the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; for he hath wrought with God this day. So the people rescued Jonathan, that he died not."

The opportunity of inflicting further damage on the Philistines at this time was thus lost through the moral obtuseness, recklessness, and obstinacy of Saul. But in many a future campaign Saul as a warrior rendered great service to the kingdom. He fought against all his enemies on every side. On the east, the Moabites, the Ammonites, and the Edomites had to be dealt with;

on the north, the kings of Zobah; on the south, the Amalekites; and on the west, the Philistines. These campaigns are briefly stated, but we may easily see how much of hard military work is implied in connection with each. We may understand, too, with what honesty David, in his elegy over Saul and Jonathan, might commemorate their warlike prowess: "From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty." Whether these military expeditions were conducted in a better spirit than Saul shows in this chapter we cannot tell. Whether further proofs were given of God's presence with Jonathan as contrasted with his absence from Saul we do not know. It does not appear that there was any essential improvement in Saul. But when Jonathan again emerges from the obscurity of history, and is seen in a clear and definite light, his character is singularly attractive—one of the purest and brightest in the whole field of Scripture.

Evidently the military spirit ruled in Saul, but it did not bring peace nor blessing to the kingdom. "He gathered an host," surrounded himself with a standing army, so as to be ready and have an excuse for any expedition that he wished to undertake. After a brief notice of Saul's family, the chapter ends by telling us that "there was sore war against the Philistines all the days of Saul; and when Saul saw any strong man or any valiant man, he took him unto him." The Philistines were far from being permanently subdued; there were not even intervals of peace between the two countries. There was bitter war, an open sore, perpetually bleeding, a terror on every side, never removed. How different it might have been had that

one day been better spent! how different it would certainly have been had Saul been a man after God's own heart! One day's misdeeds may bring a whole generation of sorrow, for "one sinner destroyeth much good." Once off the right rail, Saul never got on it again; rash and restless, he doubtless involved his people in many a disaster, fulfilling all that Samuel had said about *taking* from the people, fulfilling but little that the people had hoped concerning deliverance from the hand of the Philistines.

Who does not see what a fearful thing it is to leave God and His ways, and give one's self up to the impulses of one's own heart? Fearful for even the humblest of us, but infinitely fearful for one of great resources and influence, with a whole people under him! How beautiful some prayers in the Psalms sound after we have been contemplating the wild career of Saul! "Show me Thy ways, O Lord; teach me in Thy paths. Lead me in Thy truth and teach me, for Thou art the God of my salvation; on Thee do I wait all the day." "Oh that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all Thy commandments."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FINAL REJECTION OF SAUL.

1 Samuel xv.

HERE we find the second portion of God's indictment against Saul, and the reason for his final rejection from the office to which he had been raised. There is no real ground for the assertion of some critics that in this book we have two accounts of Saul's rejection, contradictory one of the other, because a different ground is asserted for it in the one case from that assigned in the other. The first rejection (1 Sam. xiii. 13, 14) was the rejection of his house as the permanent dynasty of Israel, but it did not imply either that Saul was to cease to reign, or that God was to withdraw all countenance and co-operation with him as king. The rejection we read of in the present chapter goes further than the first. It does not indeed imply that Saul would cease to reign, but it does imply that God would no longer countenance him as king, would no longer make him his instrument of deliverance and blessing to Israel, but would leave him to the miserable feeling that he was reigning without authority. More than that, as we know from the sequel, it implied that God was about to bring his successor forward, and thereby exhibit both to him and to the nation the evidence of his degradation and rejection. It is likely that

the transactions of this chapter occurred when Saul's reign was far advanced. If he had not been guilty of fresh disregard of God's will, though David would still have been his successor, he would have been spared the shame and misery of going out and in before his people like one who bore the mark of Cain, the visible expression of the Divine displeasure.

Throughout the whole of this chapter, God appears in that more stern and rigorous aspect of His character which is not agreeable to the natural heart of man. Judgment, we are told, is His strange work; it is not what He delights in; but it is a work which He cannot fail to perform when the necessity for it arises. There is a gospel which is often preached in our day that divests God wholly of the rigid, judicial character; it clothes Him with no attributes but those of kindness and love; it presents Him in a countenance ever smiling, never stern. It maintains that the great work of Christ in the world was to reveal this paternal aspect of God's character, to convince men of His fatherly feelings towards them, and to divest their minds of all those conceptions of indignation and wrath with which our minds are apt to clothe Him, and which the theologies of men are so ready to foster. But this is a gospel that says, Peace! peace! when there is no peace. The Gospel of Jesus Christ does indeed reveal, and reveal very beautifully, the paternal character of God; but it reveals at the same time that judicial character which insists on the execution of His law. That God will execute wrath on the impenitent and unbelieving is just as much a feature of the Gospel as that He will bestow all the blessings of salvation and eternal life on them that believe. What the Gospel reveals respecting the sterner, the judicial, aspect of God's character is,

that there is no bitterness in His anger against sinners; there is nothing in God's breast of that irritation and impatience which men are so apt to show when their fellow-men have offended them; God's anger is just. The calm, settled opposition of His nature to sin is the feeling that dictates the sentence "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." The Gospel is indeed a glorious manifestation of the love and grace of God for sinners, but it is not an indiscriminate assurance of grace for all sinners; it is an offer of grace to all who believe on God's Son, but it is an essential article of the Gospel that without faith in Christ the saving love and grace of God cannot be known. Instead of reducing the character of God to mere good-nature, the Gospel brings His righteousness more prominently forward than ever; instead of smoothing the doom of the impenitent, it deepens their guilt, and it magnifies their condemnation. Yes, my friends, and it is most wholesome for us all to look at times steadily in the face this solemn attribute of God, as the Avenger of the impenitent. It shows us that sin is not a thing to be trifled with. It shows us that God's will is not a thing to be despised. There are just two alternatives for thee, O sinner, who art not making God's will the rule of thy life. Repent, believe, and be forgiven; continue to sin, and be lost for ever.

The transaction in connection with which Saul was guilty of a fresh disregard of God's will was an expedition which was appointed for him against the Amalekites. This people had been guilty of some very atrocious treatment of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai, the details of which are not given. Nations having a corporate life, when they continue to manifest the spirit of preceding generations, are held responsible

for their actions, and liable to the penalty. Saul was sent to inflict on Amalek the retribution that had been due so long for his perfidious treatment of Israel on the way to Canaan. In the narrative, various places are mentioned as being in the Amalekite territory, but their exact sites are not known ; and indeed this matters little, all that it is important to know being that the Amalekites were mainly a nomadic people, occupying the fringe between Canaan and the desert on the south border of Palestine, and doubtless subsisting to a large extent on the prey secured by them when they made forays into the territories of Israel. Saul gathered a great army to compass the destruction of this bitter and hostile people.

In reading of the instructions he received to exterminate them, to "slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass," we shudder to think of the fearful massacre which this involved. It was an order similar to that which the Israelites received to exterminate the inhabitants of Canaan, or that to destroy the Midianites, during the lifetime of Moses. Though it seems very horrible to us, in whose eyes human life has become very sacred, it probably excited little feeling of the kind in the breasts of the Israelites, accustomed as they were, and as all Eastern nations were, to think very little of human life, and to witness wholesale slaughter with little emotion. But there is one thing in the order that we must not overlook, because it gave a complexion to the transaction quite different from that of ordinary massacres. That circumstance was, that the prey was to be destroyed as well as the people In the case of an ordinary massacre, the conquering people abandon themselves to the licence of their passions, and hasten

to enrich themselves by appropriating everything of value on which they can lay their hands. In the case of the Israelites, there was to be nothing of the kind. They were to destroy the prey just as thoroughly as they were to destroy the people. They were to enrich themselves in nothing. Now, this was a most important modification of the current practice in such things. But for this restriction, the extermination of the Amalekites would have been a wild carnival of selfish passion. The restriction appointed to Saul, like that which Joshua had imposed at Jericho, bound the people to the most rigid self-restraint, under circumstances when self-restraint was extremely difficult. The extermination was to be carried into effect with all the solemnity of a judicial execution, and the soldiers were to have no benefit from it whatever, any more than the jailer or the hangman can have benefit from the execution of some wretched murderer.

Now, let it be observed that it was in entirely disregarding this restriction that a chief part of Saul's disobedience lay. "Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them; but everything that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly." The sparing of King Agag seems to have been a piece of vanity with Saul, for a conqueror returning home with a royal prisoner was greatly thought of in those Eastern lands. But the sparing of the prey was a matter of pure greed. Observe how the character of the transaction was wholly changed by this circumstance. Instead of wearing the aspect of a solemn retribution on a sinful nation, on a people laden with iniquity, all the more impressive because the ministers

of God's vengeance abstained from appropriating a vestige of the property, but consigned the whole, like a plague-stricken mass, too polluted to be touched, to the furnace of destruction—instead of this, it just appeared like an ordinary unprincipled foray, in which the victorious party slew the other, mainly to get them out of the way and enable them without opposition to appropriate their goods. It was this consideration that made the offence of Saul so serious, that made his breach of the Divine order so guilty. Had he no knowledge of the history of his people? Did he not remember what had happened at Jericho in the days of Joshua, when Achan stole the wedge of gold and the Babylonian garment, and, in spite of the fact that the rest of the people had behaved well and that God's purpose in the main was amply carried out, Achan and all his family were judicially stoned to death? How could Saul expect that such a flagrant violation of the Divine command in the case of the Amalekites, perpetrated not on the sly by a single individual, but openly by the king and all the people, could escape the retribution of God?

Such then was Saul's conduct in the affair of Amalek. The next incident in the narrative is the communication that took place regarding it between the Lord and Samuel. Speaking after the manner of men, God said, It repented Him that He had set up Saul to be king. That these words are not to be explained in a strictly literal sense is evident from what is said in ver. 29: "The strength of Israel will not lie nor repent, for He is not a man that He should repent." The intimation to Samuel was equivalent to this: that God was now done with Saul. He had been weighed in the balances and found wanting. He had had

his time of probation, and he had failed. He was joined to his idols, and must now be let alone. This last and very flagrant act of disobedience settled the matter. "My Spirit shall not always strive with man."

How did Samuel receive the announcement? "It grieved Samuel, and he cried to the Lord all night." It is the same word as is translated in Jonah, "It displeased Jonah." But there is nothing to show that Samuel was displeased with God. The whole transaction was disappointing, worrying, heart-breaking. Doubtless he had a certain liking for Saul. He admired his splendid figure and many fine kingly qualities. It was a terrible struggle to give him up. The Divine announcement threw his mind into a tumult. All night he cried unto the Lord. Doubtless his cry was somewhat similar to our Lord's cry in Gethsemane, "If it be possible, let this cup pass." If it be possible, recover Saul. And observe, Samuel had good cause to raise this cry on account of the man who would naturally have been Saul's successor. He must have had great complacency in Jonathan. If Saul was to be set aside, why should not Jonathan have the crown? On whose head would it sit more gracefully? In whose hand would the sceptre be held more suitably? But even this plea would not avail. It was God's purpose to mark the offence of Saul with a deeper stigma, and attach to it in the mind of the nation a more conspicuous brand, by cutting off his whole family and transferring the crown to a quite different line. It took the whole night to reconcile Samuel to the Divine sentence. How very deeply and tenderly must this man's heart have been moved by regard for Saul and for the people! In the morning, his soul seems to have returned to its quiet

rest. His mood seems now to have been, "Not my will but Thine be done!"

Next comes the meeting of Saul and Samuel. Samuel seems to have expected to meet Saul at Carmel—the Carmel of Nabal (chap. xxv. 2)—but, perhaps on purpose to avoid him, Saul hastened to Gilgal. And when they met there, Saul, with no little audacity, claimed to have performed the commandment of the Lord. That this plea was not advanced in simple ignorance, as some have thought, is plain enough from Samuel's reception of it and his rebuke. "What meaneth this bleating of sheep in mine ears and the lowing of the oxen in my ears?" Facts are stubborn things, and they make quick work of sophistry. Oh, says Saul, these are brought as a sacrifice to the Lord thy God; they are an extra proof of my loyalty to Him. Saul, Saul, is it not enough that thou didst allow the selfish greed whether of thyself or of thy people to overbear the Divine command? Must thou add the sin of hypocrisy, and pretend that it was a pious act? And dost thou imagine that in so doing thou canst impose either on Samuel, or on God? O sinners, you *do* miscalculate fearfully when you give to God's servants such false explanations of your sins! How long, think you, will the flimsy material hold out? In the case of Saul, it did not even enable him to turn the corner. It brought out a fact which he must have trembled to hear: that Samuel had had a communication about him from God the very night before, and that God had spoken very plainly about him. And what had God said? God had proceeded on the fact that Saul had disobeyed his voice, and had flown upon the spoil to preserve what God had commanded him to destroy. "Nay," says Saul, "it was not I that did that, but the people, and they did it

to sacrifice to the Lord thy God in Gilgal." The excuse hardly needed to be exposed. Why did you let the people do so? Why did you not fulfil God's command as faithfully as Joshua did at Jericho? Why did you allow yourself, or the people either, to tamper with the clear orders given you by your King and theirs? "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Moral conduct is more than ceremonial form. "Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He also hath rejected thee from being king."

This terrible word pierces Saul to the quick. He is thoroughly alarmed. He makes acknowledgment of his sin in so far as he had feared the people and obeyed their words. He entreats Samuel to forgive him and turn again with him that he may worship God. He shows no evidence of true, heartfelt repentance. And Samuel refuses to return with him, and refuses to identify himself with one whom God hath rejected from being king. But Saul is deeply in earnest. He tries to detain Samuel by force. He takes hold of his mantle, and holds it so firmly that it rends. It is a symbol, says Samuel, of the rending of the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, to be given by God to a neighbour of thine that is better than thou. And this is God's irreversible sentence. Your day of grace is expired, and the Divine sentence is beyond recall. One more appeal does Saul make to Samuel. Again he owns his sin, but the request he makes shows clearly that what he is most anxious about is that he should not appear dishonoured before the people. It is his own reputation that concerns him. "Honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people and before Israel and turn again with me, that I may worship the

Lord thy God." Samuel yields. The abject wretchedness of the man seems to have touched him. But it is not said that Samuel worshipped with him. Samuel would no doubt continue firm to his purpose not to identify himself with Saul as king, or give him any moral support in his attitude of disobedience. So far from that, Samuel openly superseded him in dealing with Agag; he went out of his way, and did an act which could not but appear a frightful one for a venerable prophet of the Lord. It is the voice of the real king that sounds in the command, "Bring ye hither to me Agag, the king of the Amalekites." We seem to see the royal prisoner advancing cringingly before that imperial figure, in whose eye there is a look, and in whose face and figure there is a determination, that may well make him quail. "Surely," says Agag, imploringly, "the bitterness of death is past." Spared by the king, I am not to fare worse from the prophet. Samuel knew him a merciless destroyer. "As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women." And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal. "Cursed be he that doeth the work of God deceitfully, and cursed be he that withholdeth his sword from shedding of blood." It is a scene of terror. The swift retribution executed on the one king was but the sign of the slower retribution pronounced upon the other. In the one case the doom was rapid; in the other it was deferred; in both it was sure. And have we not here a sad picture of that retribution which is sure to come on the impenitent sinner, and in the procedure of Samuel a foreshadowing of Him who cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, who will one day speak to His enemies in His wrath and vex them in His hot displeasure?

Have we not here a foretaste of the opening of the sixth seal, when the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, shall say to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: *for the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand"?*

And oh! how little in that day will those plausible excuses avail with which men try to cover their sins to themselves, and it may be to others. How will the hail sweep away the refuges of lies! How will the real character of men's hearts, the true tenor of their lives, in respect they have set aside God's will and set up their own, be revealed in characters that cannot be mistaken! The question to be determined by your life was, whether God or you was King. Which did you obey, God's will or your own? Did you set aside God's will? Then you are certainly a rebel; and never having repented, never having been washed, or sanctified, or justified, your portion is with the rebels; the Father's house is not for you!

And now the breach between Samuel and Saul is final. "Samuel came no more to visit Saul until the day of his death; nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul; and the Lord repented that He had made Saul king over Israel."

Saul is cut off now from his best means of grace—he is virtually an excommunicated man. Was it hard? Do our sympathies in any degree go with him? To our compassion he is entitled in the highest degree, but to nothing more. Saul's worst qualities had now become petrified. His wilfulness, his selfishness, his passionateness, his jealousy, had now got complete control,

nor could their current be turned aside. The threat of losing his kingdom—perhaps the most terrible threat such a man could have felt—had failed to turn him from his wayward course. He was like the man in the iron cage in the "Pilgrim's Progress," who gave his history: "I left off to watch and be sober; I laid the reins upon the neck of my lusts; I sinned against the light of the word and the goodness of God; I have grieved the Spirit and He is gone; I tempted the devil, and he is come to me; I have provoked God to anger and He has left me; I have so hardened my heart that I cannot repent."

It is a terrible lesson that comes to us from the career of Saul. If our natural lusts are not under the restraint of a higher power; if by that power we are not trained to watch, and check, and overpower them; if we allow them to burst all restraint and lord it over us as they will,—then will they grow into so many tyrants, who will rule us with rods of iron; laugh at the feeble remonstrances of our conscience; scoff at every messenger of God; vex His Holy Spirit, and hurl us at last to everlasting woe!

CHAPTER XXII.

DAVID ANOINTED BY SAMUEL.

1 Samuel xvi. 1-13.

THE rejection of Saul was laid very deeply to heart by Samuel. No doubt there many engaging qualities in the man Saul, which Samuel could not but remember, and which fed the flame of personal attachment, and made the fact of his rejection hard to digest. And no doubt, too, Samuel was concerned for the peace and prosperity of the nation. He knew that a change of dynasty commonly meant civil war—it might lead to the inward weakening of a kingdom already weak enough, and its exposure to the attacks of hostile neighbours that watched with lynx eyes for any opportunity of dashing against Israel. Thus both on personal and on public grounds the rejection of Saul was a great grief to Samuel, especially as the rejection of Saul implied the rejection of Jonathan, and the prophet might ask, with no small reason, where, in all the nation, could there be found a better successor.

It was not God's pleasure to reveal to Samuel the tragic events that were to stretch Jonathan and his brothers among the dead on the same day as their father; but it was His pleasure to introduce him to the man who, at a future time, was to rule Israel according to the ideal which the prophet had vainly endeavoured

to press upon Saul. There is a sharpness in God's expostulation with Samuel which implies that the prophet's grief for Saul was carried to an excessive and therefore sinful length. "How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel?" Grief on account of others seems such a sacred, such a holy feeling, that we are not ready to apprehend the possibility of its acquiring the dark hue of sin. Yet if God's children abandon themselves to the wildest excess for some sorrow which bears to them the character of a fatherly chastening; if they refuse to give effect in any way to God's purpose in the matter, and to the gracious ends which He designs it to serve, they are guilty of sin, and that sin one which is greatly dishonouring to God. It can never be right to shut God out of view in connection with our sorrows, or to forget that the day is coming—impossible though it may seem—when His character shall be so vindicated in all that has happened to His children, that all tears shall be wiped from their eyes, and it shall be seen that His tender mercies have been over all His works.

It was to Bethlehem, and to the family of Jesse, that Samuel was to go to find the destined successor of Saul. The place was not so far distant from Ramah as to be quite beyond the sphere of Samuel's acquaintance. Of Jesse, one of the leading men of the place, he would probably have at least a general knowledge, though it is plain he had not any personal acquaintance with him, or knowledge of his family. Bethlehem had already acquired a marked place in Hebrew history, and Samuel could not have been ignorant of the episode of the young Moabite widow who had given such a beautiful proof of filial piety, and among whose

descendants Jesse and his sons were numbered. The very name of Bethlehem was fitted to recall how God honours those that honour Him, and might have rebuked that outburst of fear which fell from Samuel, whose first thought was that he could not go, because if Saul heard of it he would kill him. Well, it is plain enough that, with all his glorious qualities as a prophet, Samuel was but a man, subject to the infirmities of men. What an honest book the Bible is! its greatest heroes coming down so often to the human level and showing the same weaknesses as ourselves! But God, who stoops to human weakness, who fortified the failing heart of Moses at the burning bush, and the doubting heart of Gideon, and afterwards the weary heart of Elijah and the trembling heart of Jeremiah, condescends in like manner to the infirmity of Samuel, and provides him with an ostensible object for his journey, which was not fitted to awaken the jealous temper of the king. Samuel is to announce that his coming to Bethlehem is for the purpose of a sacrifice, and the circumstances connected with the anointing of a successor to Saul are to be gone about so quietly and so vaguely that the great object of his visit will hardly be so much as guessed by any.

The question has often been raised, Was this diplomatic arrangement not objectionable? Was it not an act of duplicity and deceit? Undoubtedly it was an act of concealment, but it does not follow that it was an act of duplicity. It was concealment of a thing which Samuel was under no obligation to divulge. It was not concealment of which the object was to mislead any one, or to induce any one to do what he would not have done had the whole truth been known to him. When concealment is practised in

order to take an unfair advantage of any one, or to secure an unworthy advantage over him, it is a detestable crime. But to conceal what you are under no obligation to reveal, when some important end is to be gained, is a quite different thing. "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing;" providence is often just a vast web of concealment; the trials of Job were the fruit of Divine concealment; the answers of our Lord to the Syrophœnician woman were a concealment; the delay in going to Bethany when He heard of the illness of Lazarus was just a concealment of the glorious miracle which He intended by-and-bye to perform. One may tell the truth, and yet not the whole truth, without being guilty of any injustice or dishonesty. It was not on Saul's account at all that Samuel was sent to anoint a king at Bethlehem. It was partly on Samuel's account and partly on David's. If David was hereafter to fill the exalted office of king of Israel, it was desirable that he should be trained for its duties from his earliest years. Saul had not been called to the throne till middle life, till his character had been formed and his habits settled; the next king must be called at an earlier period of life. And though the boy's father and brothers may not understand the full nature of the distinction before him, they must be made to understand that he is called to a very special service of God, in order that they may give him up freely and readily to such preparation as that service demands. This seems to have been the chief reason of the mission of Samuel to Bethlehem. It could not but be known after that, that David was to be distinguished as a servant of God, but no idea seems to have been conveyed either to his brothers or to the elders of Bethlehem that he was going to be king.

The arrangements for the public worship of God in those times—while the ark of God was still at Kirjath-jearim—seem to have been far from regular, and it appears to have been not unusual for Samuel to visit particular places for the purpose of offering a sacrifice. It would seem that the ordinary, though not the uniform, occasion for such visits was the occurrence of something blameworthy in the community, and if so this will explain the terror of the elders of Bethlehem at the visit of Samuel, and their frightened question, "Comest thou peaceably?" Happily Samuel was able to set their fears at rest, and to assure them that the object of his visit was entirely peaceable. It was a religious service he was come to perform, such a service as may have been associated with the other religious services he was accustomed to hold as he went round in circuit in the neighbourhood of Ramah. For this sacrifice the elders of Bethlehem were called to sanctify themselves, as were also Jesse and his sons. They were to take the usual steps for freeing themselves of all ceremonial uncleanness, and after the sacrifice they were to share the feast. A considerable interval would necessarily elapse between the sacrifice and the feast, for the available portions of the animal had to be prepared for food, and roasted on the fire. It was during this interval that Samuel made acquaintance with the sons of Jesse. First came the handsome and stately Eliab. And srange it is that even with the fate of the handsome and stately Saul full in his memory, Samuel leapt to the conclusion that this was the Lord's anointed. Could he wonder at God's emphatic No! Surely he had seen enough of outward appearance coupled with inward unfitness. One trial of that criterion had been enough for Israel.

But alas, it is not merely in the choice of kings that

men are apt to show their readiness to rest in the outward appearance. To what an infinite extent has this tendency been carried in the worship of God! Let everything be outwardly correct, the church beautiful, the music excellent, the sermon able, the congregation numerous and respectable—what a pattern such a church is often regarded! Alas! how little satisfactory it may be to God. The eye that searches and knows us penetrates to the heart,—it is there only that God finds the genuine elements of worship. The lowly sense of personal unworthiness, the wondering contemplation of the Divine love, the eager longing for mercy to pardon and grace to help, the faith that grasps the promises, the hope that is anchored within the veil, the kindness that breathes benediction all round, the love that beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things,—it is these things, breathing forth from the hearts of a congregation, that give pleasure to God.

Or look at what often happens in secular life. See how intensely eager some are about appearances. Why, it is one of the stereotyped rules of society that it is necessary "to keep up appearances." Well-born people may have become poor, very poor, but they must live to outward appearance as if they were rich. Between rivals there may be a deadly jealousy, but they must, by courtesy, keep up the form of friendship. And in trade a substantial appearance must be given to goods that are really worthless. And often, men who are really mean and unprincipled must pose as persons very particular about the right and very indignant at the wrong. And some, meaner than the common, must put on the cloak of religion, and establish a character for sanctity.

The world is full of idolatries, but I question if any idolatry has been more extensively practised than the idolatry of the outward appearance. If there be less of this in our day than perhaps a generation back, it is because in these days of sifting and trial men have learned in so many ways by hard experience what a delusion it is to lean on such a broken reed. Yes, and we have had men among us who from a point of view not directly Christian have exposed the shams and counterfeits of the age,—men like Carlyle, who have sounded against them a trumpet blast which has been echoed and re-echoed round the very globe. But surely we do not need to go outside the Bible for this great lesson. "Thou desirest truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part Thou shalt make me to know wisdom;" "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Or if we pass to the New Testament, what is the great lesson of the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee? The Publican was a genuine man, an honest, humble, self-emptied sinner. The Pharisee was a silly puffed-up pretender. The world seems to think that all high profession must be hollow. I need not say that such an opinion is utterly untenable. The world would have you profess nothing, lest you should not come up to it. Christ says, "Abide in Me, so shall ye bear much fruit." It was on this principle that St. Paul professed so much and did so much. "The life that I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

There is nothing to be said of the other sons of Jesse. Only the youngest one remained, apparently too young to be at the feast; he was in the field, keeping the sheep. "And Jesse sent and brought him in. Now he was

ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance" (*marg.* eyes), "and goodly to look to. And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him, for this is he." Though goodly to look at he was too young, too boyish to be preferred on the score of "outward appearance." It was qualities unseen, and as yet but little developed, that commended him. Greatly astonished must Jesse and his other sons have been to see Samuel pouring on the ruddy stripling the holy oil, and anointing him for whatever the office might be. But it has often been God's way to find His agents in unexpected places. Here a great king is found in the sheepfold. In Joseph's time a prime minister of Egypt was found in the prison. Our Lord found His chief apostle in the school of Gamaliel. The great Reformer of the sixteenth century was found in a poor miner's cottage. God is never at a loss for agents, and if the men fail that might naturally have been looked for to do Him service substitutes for them are not far to seek. Out of the very stones He can raise up children to Abraham.

But it was not a mere arbitrary arrangement that David should have been a shepherd before he was king. There were many things in the one employment that prepared the way for the other. In the East the shepherd had higher rank and a larger sphere of duties than is common with us. The duties of the shepherd, to watch over his flock, to feed and protect them, to heal the sick, bind up the broken, and bring again that which was driven away, corresponded to those which the faithful and godly ruler owed to the people committed to his sceptre. It was from the time of David that the shepherd phraseology began to be applied to rulers and their people; and we hardly carry away the full lesson that the prophets intended

to teach in their denunciations of "the shepherds that fed themselves and not the flock" when we apply these exclusively to the shepherds of souls. So appropriate was the emblem of the shepherd for denoting the right spirit and character of rulers, that it was ultimately appropriated in a very high and peculiar sense to the person and office of the Lord Jesus Christ. But long ere he appeared King David had familiarised men's minds with the kind of benefits that flow from the sceptre of a shepherd-ruler—the kind of blessings that were to flow in their fulness from Christ. Never did he write a more expressive word than this, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." On the groundwork of his own earthly kingdom he had drawn the pattern of things in heavenly places, for describing which in after times no language could be found more suitable than that borrowed from his first occupation.

But in full harmony with the character of Old Testament typology, the glory of the thing symbolized was infinitely greater than the glory of the symbol. Much though the nation owed to the godly administration of him whom God "took from the sheepfold, and brought from following the ewes great with young, to feed Jacob His people and Israel His inheritance," these benefits were shadows indeed when compared with the blessings procured by the great "Shepherd of Israel," "the good Shepherd that giveth His life for the sheep," whose shepherd care does not terminate with the life that now is, but will be exercised in eternity in feeding them and leading them by living fountains of water, where God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

There are other points of typical resemblance between David and Christ that demand our notice here. If it

was a strange-like thing for God to find the model king of Israel in a sheepcot at Bethlehem, it was still more so to find the Saviour of the world in a workshop at Nazareth. But again; King David was chosen for qualities that did not fall in with the ordinary conception of what was king-like, but qualities that commended him to God; and in the same manner the Lord Jesus Christ, God's Elect, in whom His soul delighted, was not marked by those attributes which men might have considered suitable in one who was to gain the empire of the world. "He shall grow up as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground; He hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see Him there is no beauty that we should desire Him." In bodily form the Lord Jesus would seem to have resembled David rather than Saul. There is no reason to think that there was any great physical superiority in Christ, that He was taller than the common, or that He was distinguished by any of those physical features that at first sight captivate men. And even in the region of intellectual and spiritual influence, our Lord did not conform to the type that naturally commands the confidence and admiration of the world. He had a still, quiet manner. His eloquence did not flash, nor blaze, nor flow like a torrent. The power of His words was due more to their wonderful depth of meaning, going straight to the heart of things, and to the aptness of His homely illustrations. Our Lord's mode of conquest was very remarkable. He conquered by gentleness, by forbearance, by love, by sympathy, by self-denial. He impressed men with the glory of sacrifice, the glory of service, the glory of obedience, obedience to the one great authority—the will of God—to which all obedience is due. He inspired them with a love of purity,—

purity of heart, purity after the highest pattern. If you compare our blessed Lord with those who have achieved great conquests, you cannot but see the difference. I do not mean with conquerors like Alexander, or Cæsar, or Napoleon. Napoleon himself at St. Helena showed in a word the vast difference between Christ and them. "Our conquests," said he, "have been achieved by force, but Jesus achieved His by love, and to-day millions would die for Him." But look at some who have conquered by gentler means. Take such men as Socrates, or Plato, or Aristotle. They achieved great intellectual conquests—they founded intellectual empires. But the intellect of Jesus Christ was of another order from theirs. He propounded no theory of the universe, He did not affect to explain the world of reason, He did not profess to lay bare the laws of the human mind, or prescribe conditions for the welfare of states. What strikes us about Christ's method of influence is its quiet homeliness. Yet quiet and homely though it was and is, how prodigious, how unprecedented has been its power! What other king of men has wielded a tithe of His influence? And that not with one class of society, but with all, not only with the poor and uneducated, but with thinkers and men of genius as well; not only with men and women who know the world, and know their own hearts and all their wants, and apprehend the fitness of Christ to supply them, but even with little children, in the simple unconsciousness of opening years. For out of the mouths of babes and sucklings He hath perfected praise.

Now let us mark this also, in conclusion, that besides being a King Himself Jesus makes all His people kings to God. Every Christian is designed to

be a ruler, an unconscious one it may be, but one who exercises an influence in the same direction as Christ's. How can you accomplish this? By first of all drinking into Christ's spirit, looking out on the world as He did, with compassion, sympathy, self-sacrifice, and an ardent desire for its renovation and its happiness. By walking "worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called." Not by the earthquake, or by the tempest, but by the still small voice. By quiet, steady, persistent love, goodness, and self-denial. These are the true Christian weapons, often little thought of, but really the armour of God, and weapons mighty to the pulling down of strongholds and the subjugation of the world to Christ.

CHAPTER XXIII.

*DAVID'S EARLY LIFE.**

1 SAMUEL xvi. 14-23.

BEFORE we enter at large into the incident of which these verses form the record it is desirable to settle, as far as we can, the order of events in the early life of David.

After being anointed by Samuel, David would probably return to his work among the sheep. It is quite possible that some years elapsed before anything else occurred to vary the monotony of his first occupation. The only interruption likely to have occurred to his shepherd life would be, intercourse with Samuel. It is rather striking that nothing is said, nothing is even hinted, as to the private relations that prevailed in youth between him and the venerable prophet who had anointed him with the holy oil. But it cannot be supposed that Samuel would just return to Ramah without any further communication with the youth that was to play so important a part in the future history of the country. If Saul, with all his promising qualities at the beginning, had greatly disappointed him, he could only be the more anxious on that account about the disposition and development of David. The fact that after David became the object of the murderous

* A few paragraphs on the Life of David are reproduced from the author's book "David, King of Israel."

jealousy of Saul, it was to Samuel he came when he fled from the court to tell what had taken place, and to ask advice (ch. xix. 18, 19), seems to indicate that the two men were on intimate terms, and therefore that they had been much together before. Whether David derived his views of government from Samuel, or whether they were impressed on him directly by the Spirit of God, it is certain that they were the very same as those which Samuel cherished so intensely, and which he sought so earnestly to impress on Saul. God's imperial sovereignty, and the earthly king's entire subordination to him; the standing of the people as God's people, God's heritage, and the duty of the king to treat them as such, and do all that he could for their good; the infinite and inexhaustible privilege involved in this relation, making all coquetting with false gods shameful, dishonouring to God, and disastrous to the people,—were ruling principles with Samuel and David alike. If David was never formally a pupil of Samuel's, informally he must have been so to a large extent. Samuel lived in David; and the complacency which the old prophet must have had in his youthful friend, and his pleasure in observing the depth of his loyalty to God, and his eager interest in the highest welfare of the people, must have greatly mitigated his distress at the rejection of Saul, and revived his hope of better days for Israel.

As David grew in years, but before he ceased to be a boy, he might acquire that local reputation as "a mighty valiant man and a man of war" which his friend referred to when he first mentioned him to Saul. In him as in Jonathan faith gendered a habit of dash and daring which could not be suppressed in the days of eager boyhood. The daring insolence of the Philis-

tines, whose country lay but a few miles to the west of Bethlehem, might afford him opportunities for deeds of boyish valour. Jerusalem, the stronghold of the Jebusites, was but two hours distant from Bethlehem, and on the part of its people, too, collisions with Israelites were doubtless liable to occur. It may have been now, or possibly a little later, that the contest occurred with the lion and the bear. The country round Bethlehem was not a peaceful paradise, and the career of a shepherd was not the easy life of lovesick swains which poets dream.

It was at this period of David's life that Saul's peculiar malady took that form which suggested the use of music to soothe his nervous irritation. His courtiers recommended that he should seek out a cunning player on the harp, whose soothing strains would calm him in the paroxysms of his ailment. Obviously, it was desirable that one who was to be so close to a king so full of the military spirit as Saul should have a touch of that spirit himself. David had become known to one of the courtiers, who at once mentioned him as in all respects suitable for the berth. Saul accordingly sent messengers to Jesse, bidding him send to him David his son, who was with the sheep. And David came to Saul. But his first visit seems to have been quite short. Saul's attacks were probably occasional, and at first long intervals may have occurred between them. When he recovered from the attack at which David had been sent for, the cunning harper was needed no longer, and would naturally return home. He may have been but a very short time with Saul, too short for much acquaintance being formed. But it is the way of the historians of Scripture, when a topic has once been introduced, to pursue it to its issues without note of

the events that came between. The writer having indicated how David was first brought into contact with Saul, as his musician, pursues the subject of their relation, without mentioning that the fight with Goliath occurred between. Some critics have maintained that in this book we have two accounts of David's introduction to Saul, accounts which contradict one another. In the first of them he became known to him first as a musician sent for in the height of his attack. In the other it is as the conqueror of Goliath he appears before Saul. It is the fact that neither Saul nor any of his people knew on this occasion who he was that is so strange. According to our view the order of events was this: David's first visit to Saul to play before him on his harp was a very short one. Some time after the conflict with Goliath occurred. David's appearance had probably changed considerably, so that Saul did not recognize him. It was now that Saul attached David to himself, kept him permanently, and would not let him return to his father's house (ch. xviii. 2). And while David acted as musician, playing to him on his harp in the paroxysms of his ailment (ch. xviii. 10), he went out at his command on military expeditions, and acquired great renown as a warrior (ch. xviii. 5). Thus, to turn back to the sixteenth chapter, the last two verses of that chapter record the permanent office before Saul which David came to fill after the slaughter of the Philistine. In fact, we find in that chapter, as often elsewhere, a brief outline of the whole course of events, some of which are filled up in minute detail in the chapter following.

Having thus settled the chronology, or rather the order of events in David's early history, it may be well now to examine more fully that period of his life, in so far as we have any materials for doing so.

According to the chronology of the Authorized Version, the birth of David must have occurred about the year before Christ 1080. It was about a hundred years later than the date commonly assigned to the Trojan war, and therefore a considerable time before the dawn of authentic history, at least among the Greeks or the Romans. The age of David succeeded what might be called the heroic age of Hebrew history; in one sense, indeed, it was a continuation of that period. Samson, the latest, and in some sense the greatest of the Jewish heroes, had perished not very long before; and the scene of his birth and of some of his most famous exploits lay within a very few miles of Bethlehem. In David's boyhood old men would still be living who had seen and talked with the Hebrew Hercules, and from whose lips high-spirited boys would hear, with sparkling eye and heaving bosom, the story of his exploits and the tragedy of his death. The whole neighbourhood would swarm with songs and legends illustrative of the deeds of those mighty men of valour, that ever since the sojourn in Egypt had been conferring renown on the Hebrew name. The mind of boyhood delights in such narratives; they rouse the soul, expand the imagination, and create sympathy with all that is brave and noble. We cannot doubt that such things had a great effect on the susceptible temperament of the youthful David, and contributed some elements of that manly and invincible spirit which remained so prominent in his character.

But a much more important factor in determining his character and shaping his life was the religious awakening in which Samuel had so prominent a share. Not a word is said anywhere of the manner in which David's heart was first turned to God; but this must have

been in his earliest years. We think of David as we think of Samuel, or Jeremiah, or Josiah, or John the Baptist, as sanctified to the Lord from his very childhood. God chose him at the very outset in a more vital sense than He afterwards chose him to be king. In the exercise of that mysterious sovereignty which we are unable to fathom, God made his youthful heart a plot of good soil, into which when the seed fell it bore fruit an hundredfold. In strong contrast to Saul, whose early sympathies were against the ways and will of God, those of David were warmly for them. Samuel would find him an eager and willing listener when he spoke to him of God and His ways. How strange are the differences of young persons, in this respect, when they come first under the instructions of a minister or other servant of God! Some so earnest, so attentive, so impressed; so ready to drink in all that is said; treasuring it, hiding it in their hearts, rejoicing in it like those that find great spoil. Others so hard to bring into line, so glad of an excuse for absence, so difficult to interest, so fitful and unconcerned. No doubt much depends on the skill of the teacher in working upon anything in their minds that gives even a faint response to the truth. And in no case is the aversion of the heart beyond the power of the Holy Spirit to influence and to change. But for all that, we cannot but acknowledge the mysterious sovereignty which through causes we cannot trace makes one man so to differ from another; which made Abel so different from Cain, Isaac from Ishmael, Moses from Balaam, and David from Saul.

Was David at any time a member of any of the schools of the prophets? We cannot say with certainty, but when we ponder what we read about them it

seems very likely that he was. These schools seem to have enjoyed in an eminent degree the gracious power of the Holy Spirit. The hearts of the inmates seem to have burned with the glow of devotion; the emotions of holy joy with which they were animated could not be restrained, but poured out from them, like streams from a gushing fountain, in holy songs and ascriptions to God; and such was the overpowering influence of this spirit that for a time it infected even cold-hearted men like Saul, and bore them along, as an enthusiastic crowd gathers up stragglers and sweeps them onward in its current. It seems highly probable that it was in connection with these institutions, on which so signal a blessing rested, that the devotional spirit became so powerful in David afterwards poured out so freely in his Psalms. For surely he could not be in the company of men who were so full of the Spirit without sharing their experience and pouring forth the feelings that stirred his soul.

We all believe in some degree in the law of heredity, and find it interesting to trace the features of forefathers, physical and spiritual, in the persons of their descendants. The piety, the humanity, and the affectionateness of Boaz and Ruth form a beautiful picture in the early Hebrew history, and seem to come before us anew in the character of David. Boaz was remarkable for the fatherly interest he took in his dependants, for his generous kindness to the poor, and for a spirit of gentle piety that breathed even through his secular life. Was it not the same spirit that dictated the benediction, "Blessed is he that considereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble"? Was it not the same interest in the welfare of dependants that David showed when "he dealt among the people, even the whole mul-

titude of Israel, as well to the women as to the men, to every one a cake of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine? Ruth again was remarkable for the extraordinary depth and tenderness of her affection; her words to Naomi have never been surpassed as an expression of simple, tender feeling: "Entreat me not to leave thee, nor to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." Does not this extraordinary tenderness seem to have fallen undiminished to the man who had such an affection for Jonathan, who showed such emotion on the illness of his infant child, and poured out such a flood of anguish on the death of Absalom? The history of Boaz and Ruth would surely take hold very early of his mind. The very house in which he lived, the fields where he tended his sheep, every object around him, might have associations with their memory; aged people might tell him stories of their benevolence, and pious people give him traditions of their godliness, and thus an element would be contributed to a character in which the tenderness of a woman and the piety of a saint were combined with the courage and energy of a man.

The birthplace of David, Bethlehem, is more remarkable for its moral associations than its natural features. Well has it been said by Edward Robinson of the place where both David and Jesus were born, "What a mighty influence for good has gone forth from this little spot upon the human race both for time and for eternity!" It was situated some six miles to the south of Jerusalem, and about twice that distance to the north of Hebron. The present town is built upon the north and north-east slope of a long grey ridge, with a deep valley in front

and another behind, uniting at no great distance, and running down toward the Dead Sea. The country around is hilly, but hardly beautiful; the limestone rock gives a bare appearance to the hills, which is not redeemed by boldness of form or picturesqueness of outline. The fields, though stony and rough, produce good crops of grain; olive groves, fig-orchards, and vineyards abound both in the valleys and on the gentler slopes; the higher and wilder tracts were probably devoted to the pasturing of flocks. The whole tract in which Hebron, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem are situated is elevated nearly four thousand feet above the level of Jordan and the Dead Sea on the one side, and between two and three thousand feet above the Mediterranean on the other. Among these hills and valleys David spent his youth, watching the flocks of his father.

We have seen that the life of a shepherd in those scenes was not without its times of danger, making great demands on the shepherd's courage and affection. In the main, however, it was a quiet life, affording copious opportunities for meditation and for quiet study. It was the great privilege of David to see much of God in His works and to commune with Him therein. The Psalms are full of allusions to the varied aspects of nature—the mountains, the rocks, the rivers, the valleys, the forests, the lightning, the thunder, the whirlwind.

It is not easy to say how much of the written Word existed in David's time, but at the most it could be but a fragment of what we now possess. But if the mines of revelation were few, all the more eager was his search for their hidden treasures. And David had the advantage of using what we may call a pictorial Bible. When he read of the destruction of Sodom he could

see the dark wall of Moab frowning over the lake near to which the guilty cities were consumed by the fire of heaven. When he paused to think of the solemn transactions at Machpelah, he could see in the distance the very spot where so much sacred dust was gathered. Close by his daily haunts one pillar marked the place where God spake to Jacob, and another the spot where poor Rachel died. In the dark range of Moab yon lofty peak was the spot whence Moses had his view and Balaam his vision. It was from that eminence the prophet from Pethor saw a star come out of Jacob and a sceptre rise out of Israel that should smite the corners of Moab and destroy all the children of Seth. The sympathy with God fostered by these studies and meditations was of the closest kind; an unusually clear and impressive knowledge seems to have been acquired of the purpose of God concerning Israel; drinking in himself the lessons of revelation, he was becoming qualified to become the instrument of the Holy Spirit for those marvellous contributions to its canon which he was afterwards honoured to make.

And among these hills and valleys, too, David would acquire his proficiency in the two very different arts which were soon to make him famous—the use of the sling and the use of the harp. It seems to have been his ambition, whatever he did, to do it in the best possible way. His skill in the use of the sling was so perfect that he could project a stone even at a small object with unerring certainty. His harp was probably a very simple instrument, small enough to be carried about with him, but in handling it he acquired the same perfect skill as in handling his sling. In his hands it became a wonderfully expressive instrument. And hence when Saul required a skilful musician to

soothe him, the known gifts of the young shepherd of Bethlehem pointed him out as the man.

Of the influence of music in remedying disorders of the nerves there is no want of evidence. "Bochart has collected many passages from profane writers which speak of the medicinal effects of music on the mind and body, especially as appeasing anger and soothing and pacifying a troubled spirit" (*Speaker's Commentary*). A whole book was written on the subject by Caspar Læscherus, Professor of Divinity at Wittenberg (A.D. 1688). Kitto and other writers have added more recent instances. It is said of Charles IX. of France that after the massacre of St. Bartholomew his sleep was disturbed by nightly horrors, and he could only be composed to rest by a symphony of singing boys. Philip V. of Spain, being seized with deep dejection of mind that unfitted him for all public duties, a celebrated musician was invited to surprise the king by giving a concert in the neighbouring apartment to his majesty's, with the effect that the king roused himself from his lethargy and resumed his duties. We may readily believe that in soothing power the harp was not inferior to any of the other instruments.

Still, with all its success, it was but a poor method of soothing a troubled spirit compared to the methods that David was afterwards to employ. It dealt chiefly with man's physical nature, it soothed the nervous system, and removed the hindrance which their disorder caused to the action of the powers of the mind. It did not strike at the root of all trouble—alienation from God; it did not attempt to create and apply the only permanent remedy for trouble—trust in a loving Father's care. It was a mere foreshadow, on a comparatively low and earthly ground, of the way in which David, as

the Psalmist, was afterwards to provide the true "oil of joy for the mourner," and to become a guide to the downcast soul from the fearful pit and the miry clay up to the third heaven of joy and peace. The sounds of his har pcould only operate by an influence felt alike by saint and sinner in soothing an agitated frame; but with the words of his Psalms, the Divine Spirit, by whose inspiration they were poured out, was in all coming ages to unite Himself, and to use them for showing the sin-burdened soul the true cause of its misery, and for leading it by a holy path, sorrowing yet rejoicing, to the home of its reconciled Father.

It is a painful thing to see any one in overwhelming trouble; it is doubly painful to see kings and others in high places miserable amid all their splendours, helpless amid all their resources. Alas, O spirit of man, what awful trials thou art subject to! Well mayest thou sometimes envy the very animals around thee, which, if they have no such capacities of enjoyment as thou hast, have on the other hand no such capacities of misery. The higher our powers and position, the more awful the anguish when anything goes wrong. Yet hast thou not, O man, a capacity to know that thy misery cannot be remedied till the cause of it is removed? Prodigal son, there is but one way to escape a miserable life. Arise, go to thy Father. See how He is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing to men their trespasses. Accept His offers and be at peace. Receive His Spirit and your disorder shall be healed. I own that not even then can we assure you of freedom from grievous sorrows. The best of men in this world have often most grievous sufferings. But they are strengthened to bear them while they last; they are assured that all things work together for good to them

that love God, to them that are the called according to His purpose; and they know that when "the earthly house of their tabernacle is dissolved, they have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

CHAPTER XXIV.

DAVID'S CONFLICT WITH GOLIATH.

1 SAMUEL xvii.

THESE irrepressible Philistines were never long recovering from their disasters. The victory of Jonathan had been impaired by the exhaustion of the soldiers, caused by Saul's fast preventing them from pursuing the enemy as far, and destroying their force as thoroughly, as they might have done. A new attack was organised against Israel, headed by a champion, Goliath of Gath, whose height must have approached the extraordinary stature of ten feet. Against this army Saul arrayed his force, and the two armies fronted each other on opposite sides of the valley of Elah. This valley has generally been identified with that which now bears the name of Wady-es-Sumt—a valley running down from the plateau of Judah to the Philistine plain, not more than perhaps eight or ten miles from Bethlehem. The Philistine champion appears to have been a man of physical strength corresponding to the massiveness of his body. The weight of his coat of mail is estimated at more than one hundred and fifty pounds, and the head of his spear eighteen pounds. Remembering the extraordinary feats of Samson, the Philistines might well fancy that it was now their turn to boast of a Hercules. Day after day Goliath presented himself before the army of

Israel, calling proudly for a foeman worthy of his steel, and demanding that in default of any one able to fight with him and kill him, the Israelites should abandon all dream of independence, and become vassals of the Philistines. And morning and evening, for nearly six weeks, had this proud challenge been given, but never once accepted. Even Jonathan, who had faith enough and courage enough and skill enough for so much, seems to have felt himself helpless in this great dilemma. The explanation that has sometimes been given of his abstention, that it was not etiquette for a king's son to engage in fight with a commoner, can hardly hold water; Jonathan showed no such squeamishness at Michmash; and besides, in cases of desperation etiquette has to be thrown to the winds. Of the host of Israel, we read simply that they were dismayed. Nor does Saul seem to have renewed the attempt to get counsel of God after his experience on the day of Jonathan's victory. The Israelites could only look on in grim humiliation, sullenly guarding the pass by the valley into their territories, but returning a silent refusal to the demand of the Philistines either to furnish a champion or to become their servants.

The coming of David upon the scene corresponded in its accidental character to the coming of Saul into contact with Samuel, to be designated for the throne. Everything seemed to be casual, yet those things which seemed most casual were really links in a providential chain leading to the gravest issues. It seemed to be by chance that David had three brothers serving in Saul's army; it seemed also to be by chance that their father sent his youthful shepherd son to inquire after their welfare; it was not by design that as he saluted his brethren Goliath came up and David heard his words

of defiance; still less was it on purpose to wait for David that Saul had sent no one out as yet to encounter the Philistine; and nothing could have appeared more ridiculous than that the challenge should wait to be answered by the stripling shepherd, who, with his sling and shepherd's bag thrown over his shoulder, had so little of the appearance of a man of war. It seemed very accidental, too, that the only part of the giant's person that was not thoroughly defended by his armour, his eyes and a morsel of his forehead above them, was the only part of him on which a small stone from a sling could have inflicted a fatal injury. But obviously all these were parts of the providential plan by which David was at once to confer on his country a signal boon, and to raise his name to the pinnacle of fame. And, as usual, all the parts of this pre-arranged plan fell out without constraint or interference; a new proof that Divine pre-ordination does not impair the liberty of man.

One cannot but wonder whether, in offering his prayers that morning, David had any presentiment of the trial that awaited him, anything to impel him to unwonted fervour in asking God that day to establish the works of his hands upon him. There is no reason to think that he had. His prayers that morning were in all likelihood his usual prayers. And if he was sincere in the expression of his own sense of weakness, and in his supplication that God would strengthen him for all the day's duties, it was enough. Oh! how little we know what may be before us, on some morning that dawns on us just as other days, but which is to form a great crisis in our life. How little the boy that is to tell his first lie that day thinks of the serpent that is lying in wait for him! How little the girl that is to

fall in with her betrayer thinks of the snare preparing for her body and her soul! How little the party that are to be upset in the pleasure boat and consigned to a watery grave think how the day is to end! Should we not pray more really, more earnestly if we did realise these possibilities? True, indeed, the future is hid from us, and we do not usually experience the impulse to earnestness which it would impart. But is it not a good habit, as you kneel each morning, to think, "For aught I know, this may be the most important day of my life. The opportunity may be given me of doing a great service in the cause of truth and righteousness; or the temptation may assail me to deny my Lord and ruin my soul. O God, be not far from me this day; prepare me for all that Thou preparest for me!"

The distance from Bethlehem being but a few hours' walk, David starting in the morning would arrive early in the day at the quarters of the army. When he heard the challenge of the Philistine he was astonished to find that no one had taken it up. There was a mystery about this, about the cowardice of his countrymen, perhaps about the attitude of Jonathan, that he could not solve. Accordingly, with all that earnestness and curiosity with which one peers into all the circumstances surrounding a mystery, he asked, what encouragement there was to volunteer, what reward was any one to receive who should kill this Philistine? Not that he personally was caring about the reward, but he wished to solve the mystery. It is evident that the consideration that moved David himself was that the Philistine had defied the armies of the living God. It was the same arrogant claim to be above the God of Israel, which had puffed up their minds when they took possession of the ark and placed it in the temple of their god.

"You thought so that day," David might mutter, "but what did you think next morning, when the mutilated image of your god lay prostrate on the floor? Please God, your sensations to-morrow, yea, this very forenoon, shall be such as they were then." The spirit of faith started into full and high activity, and the same kind of inspiration that had impelled Jonathan to climb into the garrison at Michmash now impelled David to vindicate the blasphemed name of Jehovah. Was it the flash of this inspiration in his eye, was it the tone of it in his voice, was it the consciousness that something desperate was to follow in the way of personal faith and daring, that roused the temper of Eliab, and drew from him a withering rebuke of the presumption of the stripling that dared to meddle with such matters? Eliab certainly did not spare him. Elder brothers are seldom remiss in rebuking the presumption of younger. "Why camest thou down hither? And with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride and the naughtiness of thy heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle." Irritating though such language was, it was borne with admirable meekness. "What have I now done? Is there not a cause?" "He that ruleth his spirit is greater than he that taketh a city." Eliab showed himself defeated by his own temper, a most mortifying defeat; David held his temper firmly in command. Which was the greater, which the better man? And the short question he put to Eliab was singularly apt, "Is there not a cause?" When all you men of war are standing helpless and perplexed in the face of this great national insult, is there not a cause why I should inquire into the matter, if, by God's help, I can do anything for my God and my people?

Undaunted by his brother's volley, he turned to some one else, and obtained a similar answer to his questions. Inspiration is a rapid process, and the course for him to pursue was now fully determined upon. His indignant tone and confident reliance on the God of Israel, so unlike the tone of every one else, excited the attention of the bystanders; they rehearsed his words to Saul, and Saul sent for him. And when he came to Saul, there was not the slightest trace of fear or faintheartedness about him. "Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine." Brave words, but, as Saul thinks, very foolish. "*You* go and fight with the Philistine? you a mere shepherd boy, who never knew the brunt of battle, and he a man of war from his youth?" Yes, Saul, that is just the way for you to speak, with your earthly way of viewing things; you, who measure strength only by a carnal standard, who know nothing of the faith that removes mountains, who forget the meaning of the name ISRA-EL, and never spent an hour as Jacob spent his night at Peniel! Listen to the reply of faith. "And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock; and I went out after him and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth; and when he arose against me I caught him by his beard, and smote him and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. David said moreover, The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine."

Could there have been a nobler exercise of faith,

a finer instance of a human spirit taking hold of the Invisible; fortifying itself against material perils by realizing the help of an unseen God; resting on His sure word as on solid rock; flinging itself fearlessly on a very sea of dangers; confident of protection and victory from Him? The only help to faith was the emembrance of the encounter with the lion and the bear, and the assurance that the same gracious help would be vouchsafed now. But no heart that was not full of faith would have thought of that, either as an evidence that God worked by him then, or as a sure pledge that God would work by him now. How many an adventurer or sportsman, that in some encounter with wild animals has escaped death by the very skin of his teeth, thinks only of his luck, or the happiness of the thought that led him to do so and so in what seemed the very article of death? A deliverance of this kind is no security against a like deliverance afterwards; it can give nothing more than a hope of escape. The faith of David recognized God's merciful hand in the first deliverance, and that gave an assurance of it in the other. What! would that God that had helped him to rescue a lamb fail him while trying to rescue a nation? Would that God that had sustained him when all that was involved was a trifling loss to his father fail him in a combat that involved the salvation of Israel and the honour of Israel's God? Would He who had subdued for him the lion and the bear when they were but obeying the instincts of their nature, humiliate him in conflict with one who was defying the armies of the living God? The remembrance of this deliverance confirmed his faith and urged him to the conflict, and the victory which faith thus gained was complete. It swept the decks clear of every vestige of terror;

it went right to the danger, without a particle of misgiving.

There are two ways in which faith may assert its supremacy. One, afterwards very familiar to David, is, when it has first to struggle hard with distrust and fear; when it has to come to close quarters with the suggestions of the carnal mind, grapple with these in mortal conflict, strangle them, and rise up victorious over them. For most men, most believing men, it is only thus that faith rises to her throne. The other way is, to spring to her throne in a moment; to assert her authority, free and independent, utterly regardless of all that would hamper her, as free from doubt and misgiving as a little child in his father's arms, conscious that whatever is needed that father will provide. It was this simple, child-like, but most triumphant exercise of faith that David showed in undertaking this conflict. Happy they who are privileged with such an attainment! Only let us beware of despairing if we cannot attain to this prompt, instinctive faith. Let us fall back with patience on that other process where we have to fight in the first instance with our fears and misgivings, driving them from us as David had often to do afterwards: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted in me? Hope in God, for I will yet praise Him who is the health of my countenance and my God."

And now David prepared himself for the contest Saul, ever carnal, and trusting only in carnal devices, is fain to clothe him in his armour, and David makes trial of his coat of mail; but he is embarrassed by a heavy covering to which he is not accustomed, and which only impedes the freedom of his arm. It is plain enough that it is not in Saul's panoply that he can meet

the Philistine. He must fall back on simpler means. Choosing five smooth stones out of the brook, with his shepherd's staff in one hand and his sling in the other, he drew near to the Philistine. When Goliath saw him no words were bitter enough for his scorn. He had sought a warrior to fight with; he gets a boy to annihilate. It is a paltry business. "Come to me, and I will give thy flesh to the fowls of the air and to the beasts of the fields." 'Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might." Was ever such proof given of the sin and folly of boasting as in the case of Goliath? And yet, as we should say, how natural it was for Goliath! But pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. In the spiritual conflict it is the surest presage of defeat. It was the Goliath spirit that puffed up St. Peter when he said to his Master, "Lord, I will go with Thee to prison and to death." It is the same spirit against which St. Paul gives his remarkable warning, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Can it be said that it is a spirit that Churches are always free from? Are they never tempted to boast of the talents of their leading men, the success of their movements, and their growing power and influence in the community? And does not God in His providence constantly show the sin and folly of such boasting? "Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

In beautiful contrast with the scornful self-confidence of Goliath was the simplicity of spirit and the meek, humble reliance on God, apparent in David's answer: "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear,

and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into my hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcases of the Philistines this day to the fowls of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hand."

What a reality God was to David! He advanced "as seeing Him who is invisible." Guided by the wisdom of God, he chose his method of attack, with all the simplicity and certainty of genius. Conscious that God was with him, he fearlessly met the enemy. A man of less faith might have been too nervous to take the proper aim. Undisturbed by any fear of missing, David hurls the stone from his sling, hits the giant on the unprotected part of his forehead, and in a moment has him reeling on the ground. Advancing to his prostrate foe, he seizes his sword, cuts off his head, and affords to both friends and foes unmistakable evidence that his opponent is dead. Rushing from their tents, the Philistines fly towards their own country, hotly pursued by the Israelites. It was in these pursuits of flying foes that the greatest slaughter occurred in those Eastern countries, and the whole road was strewn with the dead bodies of the foe to the very gates of Ekron and Gaza. In this pursuit, however, David did not mingle. With the head of the Philistine in his hands, he came to Saul. It is said that afterwards he took the head of Goliath to Jerusalem, which was then occupied, at least in part, by the Benjamites (Judges i. 21), though the

stronghold of Zion was in the hands of the Jebusites (2 Sam. v. 7). We do not know why Jerusalem was chosen for depositing this ghastly trophy. All that it is necessary to say in relation to this is, that seeing it was only the stronghold of Zion that is said to have been held by the Jebusites, there is no ground for the objection which some critics have taken to the narrative that it cannot be correct, since Jerusalem was not yet in the hands of the Israelites.

It cannot be doubted that David continued to hold the same conviction as before the battle, that it was not he that conquered, but God. We cannot doubt that after the battle he showed the same meek and humble spirit as before. Whatever surprise his victory might be to the tens of thousands who witnessed it, it was no surprise to him. He knew beforehand that he could trust God, and the result showed that he was right. But that very spirit of implicit trust in God by which he was so thoroughly influenced kept him from taking any of the glory to himself. God had chosen him to be His instrument, but he had no credit from the victory for himself. His feeling that day was the very same as his feeling at the close of his military life, when the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies :—"The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer; the God of my rock, in Him will I trust; He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my high tower and my refuge, my saviour; Thou savest me from violence."

While David was preparing to fight with the Philistine, Saul asked Abner whose son he was. Strange to say, neither Abner nor any one else could tell. Nor could the question be answered till David came back from his victory, and told the king that he was the son

of Jesse the Bethlehemite. We have already remarked that it was strange that Saul should not have recognized him, inasmuch as he had formerly given attendance on the king to drive away his evil spirit by means of his harp. In explanation it has been urged by some that David's visit or visits to Saul at that time may have been very brief, and as years may have elapsed since his last visit, his appearance may have so changed as to prevent recognition. On the part of others, another explanation has been offered. Saul may have recognized David at first, but he did not know his family. Now that there was a probability of his becoming the king's son-in-law, it was natural that Saul should be anxious to know his connections. The question put to Abner was, Whose son is this youth? The commission given to him was to enquire "whose son the stripling is." And the information given by David was, "I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite." It may be added that there is some difficulty about the text of this chapter. It seems as if somehow two independent accounts of David had been mixed together. And in one important version of the Septuagint several passages that occur in the received text are omitted, certainly with the result of removing some difficulties as the passage stands.

It is not possible to read this chapter without some thought of the typical character of David, and indeed the typical aspect of the conflict in which he was now engaged. We find an emblematic picture of the conquest of Messiah and His Church. The self-confident boasting of the giant, strong in the resources of carnal might, and incapable of appreciating the unseen and invincible power of a righteous man in a righteous cause, is precisely the spirit in which opposition to

Christ has been usually given, "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." The contempt shown for the lowly appearance of David, the undisguised scorn at the notion that through such a stripling any deliverance could come to his people, has its counterpart in the feeling towards Christ and His Gospel to which the Apostle alludes: "We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness." The calm self-possession of David, the choice of simple but suitable means, and the thorough reliance on Jehovah which enabled him to conquer, were all exemplified, in far higher measure, in the moral victories of Jesus, and they are still the weapons which enable His people to overcome. The sword of Goliath turned against himself, the weapon by which he was to annihilate his foe, employed by that very foe to sever his head from his body, was an emblem of Satan's weapons turned by Christ against Satan, "through death he destroyed him that had the power of death, and delivered them who all their lifetime were subject to bondage." The representative character of David, fighting, not for himself alone but the whole nation, was analogous to the representative character of Christ. And the shout that burst from the ranks of Israel and Judah when they saw the champion of the Philistines fall, and the enemy betake themselves in consternation to flight, foreshadowed the joy of redeemed men when the reality of Christ's salvation flashes on their hearts, and they see the enemies that have been harassing them repulsed and scattered—a joy to be immeasurably magnified when all enemies are finally conquered, and the loud voice is heard in heaven, "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God and the power of His

Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, that accused them before our God day and night."

Lastly, while we are instructed by the study of this conflict, let us be animated by it too. Let us learn never to quail at carnal might arrayed against the cause of God. Let us never fear to attack SIN, however apparently invincible it may be. Be it sin within or sin without, sin in our hearts or sin in the world, let us go boldly at it, strong in the might of God. That God who delivered David from the paw of the wild beast, and from the power of the giant, will make us more than conquerors—will enable us to spoil "principalities and powers and triumph openly over them."

CHAPTER XXV.

SAUL'S JEALOUSY—DAVID'S MARRIAGE.

1 Samuel xviii.

THE conqueror of Goliath had been promised, as his reward, the eldest daughter of the king in marriage. The fulfilment of that promise, if not utterly neglected, was at least delayed; but if David lost the hand of the king's daughter, he gained, what could not have been promised—the heart of the king's son. It was little wonder that "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." Besides all else about David that was attractive to Jonathan as it was attractive to every one, there was that strongest of all bonds, the bond of a common, all-prevailing faith, faith in the covenant God of Israel, that had now shown itself in David in overwhelming strength, as it had shown itself in Jonathan some time before at Michmash.

To Jonathan David must indeed have appeared a man after his own heart. The childlike simplicity of the trust he had reposed in God showed what a profound hold his faith had of him, how entirely it ruled his life. What depths of congeniality the two young men must have discovered in one another; in what wonderful agreement they must have found themselves respecting the duty and destiny of the Hebrew

people! That Jonathan should have been so fascinated at that particular moment shows what a pure heart he must have had. If we judge aright, David's faith had surpassed Jonathan's; David had dared where Jonathan had shrunk; and David's higher faith had obtained the distinction that might naturally have been expected to fall to Jonathan. Yet no shadow of jealousy darkens Jonathan's brow. Never were hands more cordially grasped; never were congratulations more warmly uttered. Is there anything so beautiful as a beautiful heart? After well-nigh three thousand years, we are still thrilled by the noble character of Jonathan, and well were it for every young man that he shared in some degree his high nobility. Self-seekers and self-pleasers, look at him—and be ashamed.

The friendship between David and Jonathan will fall to be adverted to afterwards; meanwhile we follow the course of events as they are detailed in this chapter.

One thing that strikes us very forcibly in this part of David's history is the rapidity with which pain and peril followed the splendid achievement which had raised him so high. The malignant jealousy of Saul towards him appears to have sprung up almost immediately after the slaughter of Goliath. "When David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music. And the women answered one another as they played, saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands; and what can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul eyed

David from that day and forward." This statement seems (like so many other statements in Scripture narratives) to be a condensed one, embracing things that happened at different times; it appears to denote that as soon as David returned from killing Goliath his name began to be introduced by the women into their songs; and when he returned from the expeditions to which Saul appointed him when he set him over the men of war, and in which he was wonderfully successful, then the women introduced the comparison, which so irritated Saul, between Saul's thousands and David's ten thousands. The truth is, that David's experience, while Saul continued to be his persecutor, was a striking commentary on the vanity of human life,—on the singularly tantalizing way in which the most splendid prizes are often snatched from men's hands as soon as they have secured them, and when they might reasonably have expected to enjoy their fruits. The case of a conqueror killed in the very moment of victory—of a Wolfe falling on the Plains of Quebec, just as his victory made Britain mistress of Canada; of a Nelson expiring on the deck of his ship, just as the enemy's fleet was helplessly defeated,—these are touching enough instances of the deceitfulness of fortune in the highest moments of expected enjoyment. But there is something more touching still in the early history of David. Raised to an eminence which he never courted or dreamt of, just because he had such trust in God and such regard for his country; manifesting in his new position all that modesty and all that dutifulness which had marked him while his name was still unknown; taking his life in his hand and plunging into toils and risks innumerable just because he desired to be of service to Saul and his country,—surely, if any

man deserved a comfortable home and a tranquil mind David was that man. That David should have become the worst treated and most persecuted man of his day; that for years and years he should have been maligned and hunted down, with but a step between him and death; that the very services that ought to have brought him honour should have plunged him into disgrace, and the noble qualities that ought to have made him the king's most trusty counsellor should have made him a fugitive and an outlaw from his presence,—all that is very strange. It would have been a great trial to any man; it was a peculiar trial to a Hebrew. For under the Hebrew economy the principle of temporal rewards and punishments had a prominence beyond the common. Why was this principle reversed in the case of David? Why was one who had been so exemplary doomed to such humiliation and trial,—doomed to a mode of life which seemed more suitable for a miscreant than for the man after God's own heart?

The answer to this question cannot be mistaken now. But that answer was not found so readily in David's time. David's early years bore a close resemblance to that period of the career of Job when the hand of God was heavy upon him, and thick darkness encompassed one on whose tabernacle the candle of the Lord had previously shone very brightly. It pleased God, in infinite love, to make David pass through a long period of hard discipline and salutary training for the office to which he was to be raised. The instances were innumerable in the East of young men of promising character being ruined through sudden elevation to supreme unchallenged power. The case of Saul himself was a sad instance of this doleful effect. It pleased God to take steps to prevent it from happening in the case of

David. It is said that when Alcibiades, the distinguished Athenian, was young, Socrates tried hard to withhold him from public life, and to convince him that he needed a long course of inward discipline before he could engage safely and usefully in the conduct of public affairs. But Alcibiades had no patience for this; he took his own way, became his own master, but with the result that he lost at once true loftiness of aim and all the sincerity of an upright soul. We do not need, however, to illustrate from mere human history the benefits that arise from a man bearing the yoke in his youth. Even our blessed Lord, David's antitype, "though He was a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered." And how often has the lesson been repeated! What story is more constantly repeated than, on the one hand, that of the young man succeeding to a fortune in early life, learning every wretched habit of indolence and self-indulgence, becoming the slave of his lusts, and after a miserable life sinking into a dishonoured grave? And on the other, how often do we find, in the biography of the men who have been an honour to their race, that their early life was spent amid struggles and acts of self-denial that seem hardly credible, but out of which came their resolute character and grand conquering power? O adversity, thy features are hard, thy fingers are of iron, thy look is stern and repulsive; but underneath thy hard crust there lies a true heart, full of love and full of hope; if only we had grace to believe this, in times when we are bound with affliction and iron; if only we had faith to look forward a very little, when, like the patriarch Job, we shall find that, after all, He who frames our lot is "very pitiful and of tender mercy"!

In the case of David, God's purpose manifestly was

to exercise and strengthen such qualities as trust in God, prayerfulness, self-command, serenity of temper, consideration for others, and the hope of a happy issue out of all his troubles. His trials were indeed both numerous and various. The cup of honour dashed from his lips when he had just begun to taste it; promises the most solemn deliberately violated, and rewards of perilous service coolly withheld from him; faithful services turned into occasions of cruel persecution; enforced separation from beloved friends; laceration of feelings from Saul's cruel and bloody treatment of some who had befriended him; calumnious charges persisted in after convincing and generous refutation; ungrateful treatment from those he had benefited, like Nabal; treachery from those he had delivered, like the men of Keilah; perfidy on the part of some he had trusted, like Cush; assassination threatened by some of his own followers, as at Ziklag,—these and many other trials were the hard and bitter discipline which David had to undergo in the wilderness.

And not only was David thus prepared for the great work of his future life, but as a type of the Messiah he foreshadowed the deep humiliation through which He was to pass on His way to His throne. He gave the Old Testament Church a glimpse of the manner in which "it became Him, by whom are all things and for whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering."

The growth of the malignant passion of jealousy in Saul is portrayed in the history in a way painfully graphic. First, it is simply a feeling that steals occasionally into his bosom. It needs some outward occasion to excite it. Its first great effort to establish

itself was when Saul heard the Hebrew women ascribing to David ten times as great a slaughter as they ascribed to Saul. We cannot but be struck with the ruggedness of the women's compliment. To honour David as more ready to incur risk and sacrifice for his country, even in encounters involving terrible bloodshed, would have been worthy of women, and worthy of good women; but to make the standard of compliment the number of lives destroyed, the amount of blood shed, indicated surely a coarseness of feeling, characteristic of a somewhat barbarous age. But the compliment was quite significant to Saul, who saw in it a proof of the preference entertained for David, and began to look on him as his rival in the kingdom. The next step in the history of Saul's jealousy is its forming itself into an evil habit, that needed no outward occasion to excite it, but kept itself alive and active by the vitality it had acquired. "And Saul eyed David from that day and forward" (ver. 9). If Saul had been a good man, he would have been horrified at the appearance of this evil passion in his heart; he would have said, "Get thee behind me, Satan;" he would have striven to the utmost to strangle it in the womb. Oh! what untold mountains of guilt would this not have saved him in after life! And what mountains of guilt, darkening their whole life, would the policy of resistance and stamping out, when an evil lust or passion betrays its presence in their heart, save to every young man and young woman who find for the first time evidence of its vitality! But instead of stamping it out, Saul nourished it; instead of extinguishing the spark, he heaped fuel on the flame. And his lust, having been allowed to conceive, was not long of bringing forth. Under a fit of his malady, even as David was playing to him with his harp, he launched

a javelin at him, no doubt in some degree an act of insanity, but yet betraying a very horrible spirit. Then, perhaps afraid of himself, he removes David from his presence, and sends him out to battle as a captain of a thousand. But David only gives fresh proofs of his wisdom and his trustworthiness, and establishes his hold more and more on the affections of the people. The very fact of his wisdom, the evidence which his steady, wise, and faithful conduct affords of God's presence with him, creates a new restlessness in Saul, who, with a kind of devilish feeling, hates him the more because "the Lord is with him, and is departed from Saul."

The next stage in the career of jealousy is to ally itself with cunning, under the pretence of great generosity. "Saul said to David, Behold my elder daughter Merab, her will I give thee to wife; only be thou valiant for me, and fight the Lord's battles. For Saul said, Let not mine hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him." But cunning and treachery are close connections, and when this promise ought to have been fulfilled, Merab was given to Adriel the Meholathite to wife. There remained his younger daughter Michal, who was personally attached to David. "And Saul said, I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." The question of dowry was a difficult one to David; but on that point the king bade his servants set his mind at rest. "The king desireth not any dowry, but an hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to be avenged of the king's enemies. And Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines."

Alas! the history of Saul's malignant passion is by

no means exhausted even by these sad illustrations of its rise and progress. It swells and grows, like a horrid tumour, becoming uglier and uglier continually. And the notices are very significant and instructive which we find as to the spiritual condition of Saul, in connection with the development of his passion. We are told that the Lord was departed from him. When Saul was reproved by Samuel for his transgression, he showed no signs of real repentance, he continued consciously in a state of enmity with God, and took no steps to get the quarrel healed. He preferred the kind of life in which he might please himself, though he offended God, to the kind of life in which he would have pleased God, while he denied himself. And Saul had to bear the awful penalty of his choice. Living apart from God, all the evil that was in his nature came boldly out, asserting itself without let or hindrance, and going to the terrible length of the most murderous and at the same time the meanest projects. Don't let any one imagine that religion has no connection with morality! Sham religion, as we have already seen, may exist side by side with the greatest wickedness; but that religion, the beginning of which is the true fear of God, a genuine reverential regard for God, a true sense of His claims on us, alike as our Creator and our Redeemer,—*that* religion lays its hand firmly on our moral nature, and scares and scatters the devices of the evil that still remains in the heart. Let us take warning at the picture presented to us in this chapter of the terrible results, even in the ordinary affairs of life, of the evil heart of unbelief that departs from the living God. The other side of the case, the effect of a true relation to God in purifying and guiding the life, is seen in the case of David. God being with him in all that he does,

he is not only kept from retaliating on Saul, not only kept from all devices for getting rid of one who was so unjust and unkind to himself, but he is remarkably obedient, remarkably faithful, and by God's grace remarkably successful in the work given him to do. It is indeed a beautiful period of David's life—the most blameless and beautiful of any. The object of unmerited hatred, the victim of atrocious plots, the helpless object of a despot's mad and ungoverned fury, yet cherishing no trace of bitter feeling, dreaming of no violent project of relief, but going out and in with perfect loyalty, and straining every nerve to prove himself a laborious, faithful, and useful servant of the master who loathed him.

The question of David's marriage is a somewhat difficult one, appearing to involve some contradictions. First of all we read that a daughter of Saul, along with great riches, had been promised to the man who should kill Goliath. But after David kills him, there is no word of this promise being fulfilled, and even afterwards, when the idea of his being the king's son-in-law is brought forward, there is no hint that he ought to have been so before. Are we to understand that it was an unauthorized rumour that was told to David (ch. xvii. 25-27) when it was said that the victor was to get these rewards? Was it that the people recalled what had been said by Caleb about Kirjath-sepher, a town in that very neighbourhood, and inferred that surely Saul would give his daughter to the conqueror, as Caleb had given his? This is perhaps the most reasonable explanation, because when David came into Saul's presence nothing of the kind was said to him by the king; and also because, if Saul had really promised it, there was no reason at the time why he should not

have kept his promise; nay, the impulsive nature of the king, and the great love of Jonathan toward David, and the love with which David inspired women, would rather have led Saul to be forward in fulfilling it, and in constituting a connection which would then have been pleasant to all. If it be said that this would have been a natural thing for Saul to do, even had there been no promise, the answer is that David was such a stripling, and even in his father's household occupied so humble a place, as to make it reasonable that he should wait, and gain a higher position, before any such thing should be thought of. Accordingly, when David became older, and acquired distinction as a warrior, his being the king's son-in-law had become quite feasible. First, Saul proposes to give him his elder daughter Merab. The murderous desire dictates the proposal, for Saul already desires David's death, though he has not courage himself to strike the blow. But when the time came, for some reason that we do not know of Merab was given to Adriel the Meholathite. David's action at an after period showed that he regarded this as a cruel wrong (2 Sam. iii. 13). Saul, however, still desired to have that hold on David which his being his son-in-law would have involved, and now proposed that Michal his younger daughter should be his wife. The proposal was accepted, but David could bring no dowry for his wife. The only dowry the king sought was a hundred foreskins of the Philistines. And the hundred foreskins David paid down in full tale.

What a distressing view these transactions give us of the malignity of Saul's heart! When parents have sacrificed the true happiness of their daughters by pressing on them a marriage of splendid misery, the motive, however selfish and heartless, has not usually

been malignant. The marriage which Saul urged between David and Michal was indeed a marriage of affection, but as far as he was concerned his sin in desiring it, as affording facilities for getting rid of him, was on that account all the greater. For nothing shows a wickeder heart than being willing to involve another, and especially one's own child, in a lifelong sorrow in order to gratify some feeling of one's own. Saul was not merely trifling with the heart and happiness of his child, but he was deliberately sacrificing both to his vile passion. The longer he lives, Saul becomes blacker and blacker. For such are they from whom the Spirit of the Lord has departed.

We may well contrast David and Saul at this period of their lives; but what a strange thing it is that further on in life David should have taken this leaf from Saul's book, and acted in this very spirit towards Uriah the Hittite? Not that Uriah was, or was to be, son-in-law to the king; alas! there was an element of blackness in the case of David which did not exist in that of Saul; but it was in the very spirit now manifested by Saul towards himself that David availed himself of Uriah's bravery, of Uriah's faithfulness, of Uriah's chivalrous readiness to undertake the most perilous expeditions—availed himself of these to compass his death. What do we learn from this? The same seeds of evil were in David's heart as in Saul's. But at the earlier period of David's life he walked humbly with God, and God's Spirit poured out on him not only restrained the evil seed, but created a pure, holy, devoted life, as if there were nothing in David but good. Afterwards, grieving the Holy Spirit, David was left for a time to himself, and then the very evil that had been so offensive in Saul came creeping forth drew itself up and claimed that it

should prevail. It was a blessed thing for David that he was not beyond being arrested by God's voice, and humbled by His reproof. He saw whither he had been going; he saw the emptiness and wickedness of his heart; he saw that his salvation depended on God in infinite mercy forgiving his sin and restoring His Spirit, and for these blessings he pled and wrestled as Jacob had wrestled with the angel at Peniel. So we may well see that for any one to trust in his heart is to play the fool; our only trust must be in Him who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. "*He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without Me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a root and withered, and men take them and cast them into the fire and they are burned.*"

CHAPTER XXVI.

SAUL'S FURTHER EFFORTS AGAINST DAVID.

1 Samuel xix.

A NEW stage of his wicked passion is now reached by Saul; he communes with his servants, and even with his son, with a view to their killing David. Ordinary conspirators are prone to confine their evil designs to their own breasts; or if they do have confidants, to choose for that purpose persons as vile as themselves, whom they bind to secrecy and silence. Saul must have been sadly overpowered by his passion when he urged his very son to become a murderer, to become the assassin of his friend, of the man with whom God manifestly dwelt, and whom God delighted to honour. It is easy to understand what line Saul would take with Jonathan. Heir to the throne, he as specially affected by the popularity of David; if David were disposed of, his seat would be in no danger. The generous prince did his utmost to turn his father from the horrid project: "He spake good of David unto Saul, and said unto him, Let not the king sin against his servant, against David; because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works have been to thee-ward very good. For he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine, and the Lord wrought a great salvation for all Israel: thou sawest it

and didst rejoice: wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?" For the moment the king was touched by the intercession of Jonathan. Possibly he was rebuked by the burst of generosity and affection,—a spirit so opposite to his own; possibly he was impressed by Jonathan's argument, and made to feel that David was entitled to very different treatment. For the time, the purpose of Saul was arrested, and "David was in his presence as in times past." "Ofttimes," says Bishop Hall, "wicked men's judgments are forced to yield unto that truth against which their affections maintain a rebellion. Even the foulest hearts do sometimes retain good notions; like as, on the contrary, the holiest souls give way sometimes to the suggestions of evil. The flashes of lightning may be discerned in the darkest prison. But if good thoughts look into a wicked heart, they stay not there; as those that like not their lodging, they are soon gone; hardly anything distinguishes between good and evil but continuance. The light that shines into a holy heart is constant, like that of the sun, which keeps due times, and varies not his course for any of these sublunary occasions."

But, as the heathen poet said, "You may expel nature with a thunderbolt, but it always returns." The evil spirit, the demon of jealousy, returned to Saul. And strange to say, his jealousy was such that nothing was more fitted to excite it than eminent service to his country on the part of David. A new campaign had opened against the Philistines. David had had a splendid victory. He slew them with a great slaughter, so that they fled before him. We may be sure that in these circumstances the songs of the women would swell out in heartier chorus than ever. And in

Saul's breast the old jealousy burst out again, and sprang to power. A fit of his evil spirit was on him, and David was playing on his harp in order to beguile it away. He sees Saul seize a javelin, he instinctively knows the purpose, and springs aside just as the javelin flies past and lodges in the wall. The danger is too serious to be encountered any longer. David escapes to his house, but hardly before messengers from Saul have arrived to watch the door, and slay him in the morning. Knowing her father's plot, Michal warns David that if he does not make his escape that night his life is sure to go.

Michal lets him down through a window, and David makes his escape. Then, to give him a sufficient start, and prolong the time a little, she has recourse to one of those stratagems of which Rebecca, and Rahab, and Jeroboam's wife, and many another woman have shown themselves mistresses—she gets up a tale, and pretends to the messengers that David is sick. The men carry back the message to their master. There is a peculiar ferocity, an absolute brutality, in the king's next order, "Bring him up to me in the bed that I may slay him." Evidently he was enraged, and he either felt that it would be a satisfaction to murder David with his own hand when unable to defend himself, or he saw that his servants could not be trusted with the dastardly business. The messengers enter the house, and instead of David they find an image in the bed, with a pillow of goat's hair for his bolster. When Michal is angrily reproached by her father for letting him escape, she parries the blow by a falsehood—"He said unto me, Let me go; why should I kill thee?"

On this somewhat mean conduct of hers a light is

incidentally shed by the mention of the image which she placed in the bed in order to personate David. What sort of image was it? The original shows that it was one of the class called "teraphim"—images which were kept and used by persons who in the main worshipped the one true God. They were not such idols as represented Baal or Ashtoreth or Moloch, but images designed to aid in the worship of the God of Israel. The use of them was not a breach of the first commandment, but it was a breach of the second. We see plainly that David and his wife were not one in religion; there was discord there. The use of the images implied an unspiritual or superstitious state of mind; or at least a mind more disposed to follow its own fancies as to the way of worshipping God than to have a severe and strict regard to the rule of God. It is impossible to suppose that David could have either used, or countenanced the use of these images. God was too much a spiritual reality to him to allow such material media of worship to be even thought of. He knew too much of worship inspired by the Spirit to dream of worship inspired by shapes of wood or stone. When we read of these images we are not surprised at the defects of character which we see in Michal. That she loved David and had pleasure in his company there is no room to doubt. But their union was not the union of hearts that were one in their deepest feelings. The sublimest exercises of David's soul Michal could have no sympathy with. Afterwards, when David brought the ark from Kirjath-jearim to Mount Zion, she mocked his enthusiasm. How sad when hearts, otherwise congenial and loving, are severed on the one point on which congeniality is of deepest moment! Agreement in earthly tastes and

arrangements, but disagreement in the one thing needful—alas, how fatal is the drawback! Little blessing can they expect who disregard this point of difference when they agree to marry. If the one that is earnest does so in the expectation of doing good to the other, that good is far more likely to be done by a firm stand at the beginning than by a course which may be construed to mean that after all the difference is of no great moment.

If the title of the fifty-ninth Psalm can be accepted as authentic, it indicates the working of David's mind at this period of his history. It is called "Michtam of David, when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him." It is not to be imagined that it was composed in the hurried interval between David reaching his house and Michal sending him away. That David had a short time of devotion then we may readily believe, and that the exercises of his heart corresponded generally to the words of the psalm, which might be committed afterwards to writing as a memorial of the occasion. From the words of the psalm it would appear that the messengers sent by Saul to apprehend him were men of base and cowardly spirit, and that they were actuated by the same personal hatred to him that marked Saul himself. No doubt the piety of David brought to him the enmity, and the success of David the rivalry, of many who would be emboldened by the king's avowed intention, to pour out their insults and calumnies against him in the most indecent fashion. Perhaps it is to show the estimate he formed of their spirit, rather than to denote literally their nationality, that the Psalmist calls on God to "awake to visit all *the heathen*." Prowling about the city under cloud of darkness coming and going and coming again to his

house, "they return at evening; they make a noise like a dog, and go about the city. Behold, they belch out with their mouth; swords are in their lips; for who, say they, doth hear?" Thus showing his estimate of his enemies, the Psalmist manifests the most absolute reliance on the protection and grace of God. "But Thou, O Lord, shalt laugh at them; Thou shalt have all the heathen in derision. Because of his strength will I wait upon Thee; for God is my defence. The God of my mercy shall prevent me; God shall let me see my desire upon mine enemies." He does not ask that they may be slain, but he asks that they may be conspicuously dishonoured and humbled, and made to go about the city like dogs, in another sense—not like dogs seeking to tear upright men in pieces, but like those starved, repulsive, cowardly brutes, familiar in Eastern cities, that would do anything for a morsel of food. His own spirit is serene and confident—"Unto Thee, O my strength, will I sing; for God is my defence, and the God of my mercy."

It may be that the superscription of this psalm is not authentic, and that the reference is either to some other passage in David's life, or in the life of some other psalmist, when he was especially exposed to the ravings of a murderous and calumnious spirit, and in the midst of unscrupulous enemies thirsting for his life. The psalm is eminently fitted to express the feelings and experiences of the Church of Christ in times of bitter persecution. For calumny has usually been the right-hand instrument of the persecutor. To justify himself, he has found it necessary to denounce his victim. Erroneous opinions, it is instinctively felt, are no such offence as to warrant the wholesale spoliation and murder which vehement persecution calls for. Crimes of a horrible

description are laid to the charge of the persecuted. And even where the sword of persecution in its naked form is not employed, but opposition and hatred vent themselves on the more active servants of God in venomous attacks and offensive letters, it is not counted enough to denounce their opinions. They must be charged with meanness, and double dealing, and vile plots and schemes to compass their ends. They are spoken of (as St. Paul and his companions were) as the offscourings of the earth, creatures only to be hunted out of sight and spoiled of all influence. Happy they who can bear all in the Psalmist's tranquil and truthful spirit; and can sum up their feelings like him—"I will sing of Thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of Thy mercy in the morning; for Thou hast been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble."

But let us return to David. Can we think of a more desolate condition than that in which he found himself after his wife let him down through a window? It is night, and he is alone. Who could be unmoved when place in such a position? Forced to fly from his home and his young wife, just after he had begun to know their sweets, and no prospect of a happy return! Driven forth by the murderous fury of the king whom he had served with a loyalty and a devotion that could not have been surpassed! His home desolated and his life threatened by the father of his wife, the man whom even nature should have inspired with a kindly interest in his welfare! What good had it done him that he had slain that giant? What return had he got for his service in ever so often soothing the nerves of the irritable monarch with the gentle warblings of his harp? What good had come of all his perilous exploits against the Philistines, of the hundred

foreskins of the king's enemies, of the last great victory which had brought so unprecedented advantage to Israel? Would it not have been better for him never to have touched a weapon, never to have encountered a foe, but kept feeding that flock of his father's, and caring for those irrational creatures, who had always returned his kindness with gratitude, and been far more like friends and companions than that terrible Saul? Such thoughts might perhaps hover about his bosom, but certainly they would receive no entertainment from him. They might knock at his door, but they would not be admitted. A man like David could never seriously regret that he had done his duty. He could never seriously wish that he had never responded to the call of God and of his country. But he might well feel how empty and unprofitable even the most successful worldly career may become, how maddening the changes of fortune, how intolerable the unjust retributions of men in power. His ill-treatment was so atrocious that, had he not had a refuge in God, it might have driven him to madness or to suicide. It drove him to the throne of grace, where he found grace to help him in his time of need.

It was no wonder that the fugitive thought of Samuel. If he could get shelter with him Saul would surely let him alone, for Saul could have no mind to meddle with Samuel again. But more than that; in Samuel's company he would find congenial fellowship, and from Samuel's mature wisdom and devotion to God's law learn much that would be useful in after life. We can easily fancy what a cordial welcome the old prophet would give the youthful fugitive. Was not David in a sense his son, seeing that he had chosen him from among all the sons of Jesse, and poured on him the

holy oil? If an old minister has a special interest in one whom he has baptized, how much more Samuel in one whom he had anointed! And there was another consideration that would have great effect with Samuel. Old Christians feel very tenderly for young believers who have had hard lines in serving God. It moves them much when those on whom they have very earnestly pressed God's ways have encountered great trials in following them. Gladly would they do anything in their power to soothe and encourage them. Samuel's words to David would certainly be words of exceeding tenderness. They must have fallen like the dew of Hermon on his fevered spirit. Doubtless they would tend to revive and strengthen his faith, and assure him that God would keep him amid all his trials, and at last set him on high, because he had known his name.

From Ramah, his ordinary dwelling-place, Samuel had gone with David to Naioth, perhaps under the idea that they would elude the eye of Saul. Not so, however. Word of David's place of abode was carried to the king. Saul was deeply in earnest in his effort to get rid of David,—surely a very daring thing when he must have known God's purpose regarding him. Messengers were accordingly sent to Naioth. It was the seat of one of the schools of the prophets, and David could not but be deeply interested in the work of the place, and charmed with its spirit. Here, under the wing of Samuel, he did dwell in safety; but his safety did not come in the way in which perhaps he expected. Saul's purpose was too deeply seated to be affected by the presence of Samuel. Nay, though Samuel in all likelihood had told him how God had caused him to anoint David as his successor, Saul determined to drag him even from the hands of Samuel. But Saul

never counted on the form of opposition he was to encounter. The messengers went to Naioth, but their hearts were taken hold of by the Spirit who was then working in such power in the place, and from soldiers they were turned into prophets. A second batch of messengers was sent, and with the same result. A third batch followed, and still the same miraculous transformation. Determined not to be baffled, and having probably exhausted the servants whom he could trust, Saul went himself to Ramah. But Saul was proof no more than his servants against the marvellous spiritual force that swept all before it. When he came to Ramah, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and he went on and prophesied all the way from Ramah to Naioth. And there, stripping himself of his royal robes and accoutrements, he prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down, just as one of the prophets, and continued so a whole day and night. It was a repetition of what had taken place at "the hill of God" when Saul returned from his search after the asses (1 Sam. x. 10, 11), and it resuscitated the proverb that had been first used on that occasion, is Saul also among the prophets? Transformed and occupied as Saul was now, he was in no mood to carry out his murderous project against David, who in the view of this most unexpected form of deliverance might well sing, "My safety cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

The question cannot but press itself on us, What was the character of the influence under which Saul was brought on this remarkable occasion? Observe the phenomena so far as they are recorded. In the first place, nothing is said of any appeal to Saul's reason and conscience. In the second place, no such conduct

followed this experience as would have followed it, had his reason and conscience been impressed. He was precisely the same wicked man as before. In the third place, there is no evidence of anything else having taken place than a sort of contagious impression being produced on his physical nature, something corresponding to the effect of mesmerism or animal magnetism. In earnest religious movements of a very solid character, it has been often remarked that another unusual experience runs alongside of them; in some persons in contact with them a nervous susceptibility is developed, which sometimes causes prostration, and sometimes a state of trance; and it has been found that many persons are liable to the state of trance whose hearts and lives are in no way transformed by the religious impression. It seems to have been some such experience that befell Saul. He was entranced, but he was not changed. He was for the time another man, but there was no permanent change; after a time, his old spirit returned. Evidently he was a man of great nervous susceptibility, and it is plain from many things that his nerves had become weakened. He fell for the time under the strong influence of the prophetic company; but David did not trust him, for he fled from Naioth.

And yet, even if this was all that happened to Saul, there was something providential and merciful in it that might have led on to better results. Was it not in some sense a dealing of God with Saul? Was it not a reminder of that better way which Saul had forsaken, and in forsaking which he had come to so much guilt and trouble? Was it not a gracious indication that even yet, if he would return to God, though he could not get back the kingdom he might personally be blessed? Whatever of this kind there might be in it,

it was trampled by Saul under foot. He had made his bed, and, thorny though it was, he was determined to lie on it. He would not change his life; he would not return to God.

Does not God, in His merciful providence, often deal with transgressors as he dealt with Saul, placing them in circumstances that make it comparatively easy for them to turn from their sins and change their life? Your marriage, a death in your circle, a change of residence, a change of fortune, forming a new acquaintance, coming under a new ministry,—oh! friends, if there be in you the faintest dissatisfaction with your past life, the faintest desire for a better, take advantage of the opportunity, and turn to God. Summon courage, break with your associates in sin (the loss will be marvellously small), give up your dissipated pleasures, betake yourselves to the great matters that concern your welfare evermore. Mark in the providence that gave you the opportunity, the kind hand of a gracious Father, sadly grieving over your erring life, and longing for your return. Harden not your heart as in the provocation in the day of temptation in the wilderness. Don't drive the angel out of your way, who stands in your path, as he stood in Balaam's, to stop your progress in the ways of sin. Who knows whether ever again you shall have the same opportunity? And even if you have, is it not certain that the disinclination you feel now will be stiffer and stronger then? Be a man, and face the irksome. Whatever you do, determine to do right. It is childish to stand shivering over a duty which you know ought to be done. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

CHAPTER XXVII.

DAVID AND JONATHAN.

1 Samuel xx.

WE have no means of determining how long time elapsed between the events recorded in the preceding chapter and those recorded in this. It is not unlikely that Saul's experience at Naioth led to a temporary improvement in his relations to David. The tone of this chapter leads us to believe that at the time when it opens there was some room for doubt whether or not Saul continued to cherish any deliberate ill-feeling to his son-in-law. David's own suspicions were strong that he did; but Jonathan appears to have thought otherwise. Hence the earnest conversation which the two friends had on the subject; and hence the curious but crooked stratagem by which they tried to find out the truth.

But before we go on to this, it will be suitable for us at this place to dwell for a little on the remarkable friendship between David and Jonathan—a beautiful oasis in this wilderness history,—one of the brightest gems in this book of Samuel.

It was a striking proof of the ever mindful and considerate grace of God, that at the very opening of the dark valley of trial through which David had to pass in consequence of Saul's jealousy, he was brought

into contact with Jonathan, and in his disinterested and sanctified friendship, furnished with one of the sweetest earthly solaces for the burden of care and sorrow. The tempest suddenly let loose on him must have proved too vehement, if he had been left in Saul's dark palace without one kind hand to lead him on, or the sympathy of one warm heart to encourage him; the spirit of faith might have declined more seriously than it did, had it not been strengthened by the bright faith of Jonathan. It was plain that Michal, though she had a kind of attachment to David, was far from having a thoroughly congenial heart; she loved him, and helped to save him, but at the same time bore false witness against him (chap. xix. 17). In his deepest sorrows, David could have derived little comfort from her. Whatever gleams of joy and hope, therefore, were now shed by human companionship across his dark firmament, were due to Jonathan. In merciful adaptation to the infirmities of his human spirit, God opened to him this stream in the desert, and allowed him to refresh himself with its pleasant waters; but to show him, at the same time, that such supplies could not be permanently relied on, and that his great dependence must be placed, not on the fellowship of mortal man, but on the ever-living and ever-loving God, Jonathan and he were doomed, after the briefest period of companionship, to a lifelong separation, and the friendship which had seemed to promise a perpetual solace of his trials, only aggravated their severity, when its joys were violently reft away.

In another view, David's intercourse with Jonathan served an important purpose in his training. The very sight he constantly had of Saul's outrageous wickedness might have nursed a self-righteous feeling,

—might have encouraged the thought, so agreeable to human nature, that as Saul was rejected by God for his wickedness, so David was chosen for his goodness. The remembrance of Jonathan's singular virtues and graces was fitted to rebuke this thought; for if regard to human goodness had decided God's course in the matter, why should not Jonathan have been appointed to succeed his father? From the self-righteous ground on which he might have been thus tempted to stand, David would be thrown back on the adorable sovereignty of God; and in deepest humiliation constrained to own that it was God's grace only that made him to differ from others.

Ardent friendships among young men were by no means uncommon in ancient times; many striking instances occurred among the Greeks, which have sometimes been accounted for by the comparatively low estimation in which female society was then held. "The heroic companions celebrated by Homer and others," it has been remarked, "seem to have but one heart and soul, with scarcely a wish or object apart, and only to live, as they are always ready to die, for one another. . . . The idea of a Greek hero seems not to have been thought complete without such a brother in arms by his side." *

But there was one feature of the friendship of Jonathan and David that had no parallel in classic times,—it was friendship between two men, of whom the younger was a most formidable rival to the older. It is Jonathan that shines most in this friendship, for he was the one who had least to gain and most to lose from the other. He knew that David was ordained by

* Thirlwall's "History of Greece."

God to succeed to his father's throne, yet he loved him; he knew that to befriend David was to offend his father, yet he warmly befriended him; he knew that he must decrease and David increase, yet no atom of jealousy disturbed his noble spirit. What but divine grace could have enabled Jonathan to maintain this blessed temper? What other foundation could it have rested on but the conviction that what God ordained must be the very best, infinitely wise and good for him and for all? Or what could have filled the heart thus bereaved of so fair an earthly prospect, but the sense of God's love, and the assurance that He would compensate to him all that He took from him? How beautiful was this fruit of the Spirit of God! How blessed it would be if such clusters hung on every branch of the vine!

Besides being disinterested, Jonathan's friendship for David was of an eminently holy character. Evidently Jonathan was a man that habitually honoured God, if not in much open profession, yet in the way of deep reverence and submission. And thus, besides being able to surrender his own prospects without a murmur, and feel real happiness in the thought that David would be king, he could strengthen the faith of his friend, as we read afterwards (chap. xxiii. 16): "Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God." At the time when they come together in the chapter before us, Jonathan's faith was stronger than David's. David's faltering heart was saying, "There is but a step between me and death" (ver. 3), while Jonathan in implicit confidence in God's purpose concerning David was thus looking forward to the future,—"Thou shalt not only while yet I live show me the kindness of the Lord that I die not; but

also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever; no, not when the Lord hath cut off the enemies of David every one from the face of the earth." There has seldom, if ever, been exhibited a finer instance of triumphant faith, than when the prince, with all the resources of the kingdom at his beck, made this request of the helpless outlaw. What a priceless blessing is the friendship of those who support and comfort us in great spiritual conflicts, and help us to stand erect in some great crisis of our lives! How different from the friendship that merely supplies the merriment of an idle hour, at the expense, perhaps, of a good conscience, and to the lasting injury of the soul!

But let me now briefly note the events recorded in this chapter. It is a long chapter, one of those long chapters in which incidents are recorded with such fulness of detail, as not only to make a very graphic narrative, but to supply an incidental proof of its authenticity.

First of all, we have the preliminary conversation between David and Jonathan, as to the real feeling of Saul toward David. Incidentally, we learn how much Saul leant on Jonathan: "My father will do nothing, either great or small, but he will show it me,"—a proof that Jonathan was, like Joseph before him, and like Daniel after him, eminently trustworthy, and as sound in judgment as he was noble in character. Guileless himself, he suspected no guile in his father. But David was not able to take so favourable a view of Saul. So profound was his conviction to the contrary, that in giving his reason for believing that Saul had concealed from his son his real feeling in the matter, and the danger in which he was, he used the solemn language of adjuration: "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul

liveth, there is but a step between me and death." Viewed from the human point, this was true; viewed from under the Divine purpose and promise, it could not be true. Yet we cannot blame David, knowing as he did what Saul really felt, for expressing his human fears, and the distress of mind to which the situation gave birth.

Next, we find a device agreed on between David and Jonathan, to ascertain the real sentiments of Saul. It was one of those deceitful ways to which, very probably, David had become accustomed in his military experiences, in his forays against the Philistines, where stratagems may have been, as they often were, a common device. It was probable that David would be missed from Saul's table next day, as it was the new moon and a feast; if Saul inquired after him, Jonathan was to pretend that he had asked leave to go to a yearly family sacrifice at Bethlehem; and the way in which Saul should take this explanation would show his real feeling and purpose about David. In the event of Saul being enraged, and commanding Jonathan to bring David to him, David implored Jonathan not to comply; rather kill him with his own hand than that; for there was nothing that David dreaded so much as falling into the hands of Saul. Jonathan surely did not deserve that it should be thought possible for him to surrender David to his father, or to conceal anything from him that had any bearing on his welfare. But inasmuch as David had put the matter in the form he did, it seemed right to Jonathan that a very solemn transaction should take place at this time, to make their relation as clear as day, and to determine the action of the stronger of them to the other, in time to come

This is the third thing in the chapter. Jonathan takes David into the field, that is, into some sequestered

Wady, at some distance from the town, where they would be sure to enjoy complete solitude; and there they enter into a solemn covenant. Jonathan takes the lead. He begins with a solemn appeal to God, calling on Him not as a matter of mere form or propriety, but of real and profound significance. First, he binds himself to communicate faithfully to David the real state of things on the part of his father, whether it should be for good or for evil. And then he binds David, whom by faith he sees in possession of the kingly power, in spite of all that Saul may do against him, first to be kind to himself while he lived, and not cut him off, as new kings so often massacred all the relations of the old; and also after his death to show kindness to his family, and never cease to remember them, not even when raised to such a pitch of prosperity that all his enemies were cut off from the earth. One knows not whether most to wonder at the faith of Jonathan, or the sweetness of his nature. It is David, the poor outlaw, with hardly a man to stand by him, that appears to Jonathan the man of power, the man who can dispose of all lives and sway all destinies; while Jonathan, the king's son and confidential adviser, is somehow reduced to helplessness, and unable even to save himself. But was there ever such a transaction entered into with such sweetness of temper? The calmness of Jonathan in contemplating the strange reverse of fortune both to himself and to David, is exquisitely beautiful; nor is there in it a trace of that servility with which mean natures worship the rising sun; it is manly and generous while it is meek and humble; such a combination of the noble and the submissive as was shown afterwards, in highest form, in the one perfect example of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Next comes a statement of the way in which Jonathan was to announce to David the result. It might not be safe for him to see David personally, but in that case he would let him know what had transpired about him through a preconcerted signal, in reference to the place where he would direct an attendant to go for some arrows. As it happened, a personal interview was obtained with David; but before that, the telegraphing with the arrows was carried out as arranged.

On the first day of the feast, David's absence passed unnoticed, Saul being under the impression that he had acquired ceremonial uncleanness. But as that excuse could only avail for one day, Saul finding him absent the second day, asked Jonathan what had become of him. The excuse agreed on was given. It excited the deepest rage of Saul. But his rage was not against David so much as against Jonathan for taking his part. Saul did not believe in the excuse, otherwise he would not have ordered Jonathan to send and fetch David. If David was at Bethlehem, Saul could have sent for him himself; if he lay concealed in the neighbourhood, Jonathan alone would know his hiding-place, therefore Jonathan must get hold of him. If this be the true view, the stratagem of Jonathan had availed nothing; the plain truth would have served the purpose no worse. As it was, Jonathan's own life was in the most imminent danger. Remonstrating with his father for seeking to destroy David, he narrowly escaped his father's javelin, even though, a moment before, in his jealousy of David, Saul had professed to be concerned for the interests of Jonathan. "Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman, do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion, and to the confusion of thy mother's nakedness?"

What strange and unworthy methods will not angry men and women resort to, to put vinegar into their words and make them sting! To try to wound a man's feelings by reviling his mother, or by reviling any of his kindred, is a practice confined to the dregs of society, and nauseous, to the last degree, to every gentle and honourable mind. In Saul's case, the offence was still more infamous because the woman reviled was his own wife. Surely if her failings reflected on any one, they reflected on her husband rather than her son. But that it was any real failing that Saul denounced when he called her "the perverse rebellious woman," we greatly doubt. To a man like Saul, any assertion of her rights by his wife, any refusal to be his abject slave, any opposition to his wild and wicked designs against David, would mean perversity and rebellion. We are far from thinking ill of this nameless woman because her husband denounced her to her son. But when we see Saul in one breath trying to kill his son with a javelin and to destroy his wife's character by poisoned words, and at the same time thirsting for the death of his son-in-law, we have a mournful exhibition of the depth to which men are capable of descending from whom the Spirit of the Lord hath departed.

No wonder that Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did eat no meat the second day of the month. One wonders how the feast went on thereafter, but one does not envy the guests. Did Saul drown his stormy feelings in copious draughts of wine, and turn the holy festival into a bacchanalian rout, amid whose boisterous mirth and tempestuous exhilaration the reproaches of conscience would be stifled for the hour?

The third day has come, on which, by preconcerted agreement, Jonathan was to reveal to David his father's state of mind. David is in the agreed-on hiding-place; and Jonathan, sallying forth with his servant, shoots his arrows to the place which was to indicate the existence of danger. Then, the lad having gone back to the city, and no one being on the spot to observe them or interrupt them, the two friends come together and have an affecting meeting. When Jonathan parted from David three days before, he had not been without hopes of bringing to him a favourable report of his father. David expected nothing of the kind; but even David must have been shocked and horrified to find things so bad as they were now reported. In an act of unfeigned reverence for the king's son, David bowed himself three times to the ground. In token of much love they kissed one another; while under the dark cloud of adversity that had risen on them both, and that now compelled them to separate, hardly ever again (as it turned out) to see one another in the flesh, "they wept one with another until David exceeded."

> "They wept as only strong men weep,
> When weep they must, or die."

One consolation alone remained, and it was Jonathan that was able to apply it. "Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying, The Lord be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever." Yes, even in that darkest hour, Jonathan could say to David, "Go *in peace*." What peace? "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee." "The angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear Him, and

delivereth them." "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth them out of them all."

We cannot turn from this chapter without adding a word on the friendships of the young. It is when hearts are tender that they are most readily knit to each other, as the heart of Jonathan was knit to the heart of David. But the formation of friendships is too important a matter to be safely left to casual circumstances. It ought to be gone about with care. If you have materials to choose among, see that you choose the best. At the foundation of all friendship lies congeniality of heart—a kindred feeling of which one often becomes conscious by instinct at first sight. But there must also be elements of difference in friends. It is a great point to have a friend who is above us in some things, and who will thus be likely to draw us up to a higher level of character, instead of dragging us down to a lower. And a friend is very useful, if he is rich in qualities where we are poor. As it is in *In Memoriam*—

> "He was rich where I was poor,
> And he supplied my want the more
> As his unlikeness fitted mine."

But surely, of all qualities in a friend or companion who is to do us good, the most vital is, that he fears the Lord. As such friendships are by far the most pleasant, so they are by far the most profitable. And when you have made friends, stick by them. Don't let it be said of you that your friend seemed to be everything to you yesterday, but nothing to-day. And if your friends rise above you in the world, rejoice in their prosperity, and banish every envious feeling; or if you should rise above them, do not forget them,

nor forsake them, but, as if you had made a covenant before God, continue to show kindness to them and to their children after them. Pray for them, and ask them to pray for you.

Perhaps it was with some view to the friendship of Jonathan and his father that Solomon wrote, "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." Jonathan was such a friend to David. But the words suggest a higher friendship. The glory of Jonathan's love for David fades before our Lord's love for His brethren. If Jonathan were living among us, who of us could look on him with indifference? Would not our hearts warm to him, as we gazed on his noble form and open face, even though *we* had never been the objects of his affection? In the case of Jesus Christ, we have all the noble qualities of Jonathan in far higher excellence than his, and we have this further consideration, that for us He has laid down His life, and that none who receive His friendship can ever be separated from His love. And what an elevating and purifying effect that friendship will have! In alliance with Him, you are in alliance with all that is pure and bright, all that is transforming and beautifying; all that can give peace to your conscience, joy to your heart, lustre to your spirit, and beauty to your life; all that can make your garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia; all that can bless you and make you a blessing. And once you are truly His, the bond can never be severed; David had to tear himself from Jonathan, but you will never have to tear yourselves from Christ. Your union is cemented by the blood of the everlasting covenant; and by the eternal efficacy of the prayer, "Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DAVID AT NOB AND AT GATH.

1 Samuel xxi.

WE enter here on a somewhat painful part of David's history. He is not living so near to God as before, and in consequence his course becomes more carnal and more crooked. We saw in our last chapter the element of distrust rising up somewhat ominously in that solemn adjuration to Jonathan, "Truly as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death." These words, it is true, gave expression to an undoubted and in a sense universal truth, a truth which all of us should at all times ponder, but which David had special cause to feel, under the circumstances in which he was placed. It was not the fact of his giving solemn expression to this truth that indicated distrust on the part of David, but the fact that he did not set over against it another truth which was just as real,—that God had chosen him for His service, and would not allow him to perish at the hand of Saul. When a good man sees himself exposed to a terrible danger which he has no means of averting, it is no wonder if the contemplation of that danger gives rise for the moment to fear. But it is his privilege to enjoy promises of protection and blessing at the hand of the unseen God, and if his faith in

these promises be active, it will not only neutralize the fear, but raise him high above it. Now, the defect in David's state of mind was, that while he fully realized the danger, he did not by faith lay hold of that which was fitted to neutralize it. It was Jonathan rather than David who by faith realized at this time David's grounds of security. All through Jonathan's remarks in chapter xx. you see him thinking of God as David's Protector,—thinking of the great purposes which God meant to accomplish by him, and which were a pledge that He would preserve him now,—thinking of David as a coming man of unprecedented power and influence, whose word would determine other men's destinies, and dispose of their fortunes. David seems to have been greatly indebted to Jonathan for sustaining his faith while he was with him; for after he parted from Jonathan, his faith fell very low. Time after time, he follows that policy of deceit which he had instructed Jonathan to pursue in explaining his absence from the feast in Saul's house. It is painful in the last degree to see one whose faith towered to such a lofty height in the encounter with Goliath, coming down from that noble elevation, to find him resorting for self-protection to the lies and artifices of an impostor.

We cannot excuse it, but we may account for it. David was wearied out by Saul's restless and incessant persecution. We read in Daniel of a certain persecutor that he should "wear out the saints of the Most High," and it was the same sad experience from which David was now suffering. It does not appear that he was gifted naturally with great patience, or power of enduring. Rather we should suppose that one of such nimble and lively temperament would soon tire of a strained and uneasy attitude. It appears that Saul's persistency

in injustice and cruelty made David at last restless and impatient. All the more would he have needed in such circumstances to resort to God, and seek from Him the oil of grace to feed his patience, and bear him above the infirmities of his nature. But this was just what he seems not to have done. Carnal fear therefore grew apace, and faith fell into a state of slumber. The eye of sense was active, looking out on the perils around him; the eye of faith was dull, hardly able to decipher a single promise. The eye of sense saw the vindictive scowl of Saul, the javelin in his hand, and bands of soldiers sent out on every side to seize David or slay him; the eye of faith did not see—what it might have seen—the angel of the Lord encamping around him and delivering him. It was God's purpose now to allow David to feel his own weakness; he was to pass through that terrible ordeal when, tossed on a sea of trials, one feels like Noah's dove, unable to find rest for the sole of one's foot, and seems on the very eve of dropping helpless into the billows, till the ark presents itself, and a gracious hand is put forth to the rescue. Left to himself, tempted to make use of carnal expedients, and taught the wretchedness of such expedients; learning also, through this discipline, to anchor his soul more firmly on the promise of the living God, David was now undergoing a most essential part of his early training, gaining the experience that was to qualify him to say with such earnestness to others, "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him."

On leaving Gibeah, David, accompanied with a few followers, bent his steps to Nob, a city of the priests. The site of this city has not been discovered; some think it stood on the north-eastern ridge of Mount

Olivet; this is uncertain, but it is evident that it was very close to Jerusalem (see Isa. x. 32). Its distance from Gibeah would therefore be but five or six miles, much too short for David to have had there any great sense of safety. It appears to have become the seat of the sacred services of the nation, some time after the destruction of Shiloh. David's purpose in going there seems to have been simply to get a shelter, perhaps for the Sabbath day, and to obtain supplies. Doeg, indeed, charged Ahimelech, before Saul, with having inquired of the Lord for David, but Ahimelech with some warmth denied the charge.* The privilege of consulting the Urim and Thummim seems to have been confined to the chief ruler of the nation; if with the sanction of the priest David had done so now, he might have justly been charged with treason; probably it was because he believed Doeg rather than Ahimelech, and concluded that this royal privilege had been conceded by the priests to David, that Saul was so enraged, and inflicted such dreadful retribution on them. Afterwards, when Abiathar fled to David with the high priest's ephod, through which the judgment of Urim and Thummim seems to have been announced, David regarded that circumstance as an indication of the Divine permission to him to make use of the sacred oracle.

But what shall we say of the untruth which David told Ahimelech, to account for his coming there without armed attendants? "The king hath commanded me a business, and hath said unto me, Let no man know any-

* See 1 Sam. xxii. 15:—"Have I to-day begun to inquire of God for him? be it far from me: let not the king impute anything unto his servant, nor to all the house of my father; for thy servant knoweth nothing of all this, less or more" (R.V.) To deny beginning to do a thing is much the same as to deny doing it.

thing of the business whereabout I send thee, and what I have commanded thee; and I have commanded my servants to such and such a place." Here was a statement not only not true, but the very opposite of the truth; spoken too to God's anointed high priest, and in the very place consecrated to God's most solemn service; everything about the speaker fitted to bring God to his mind, and to recal God's protection of him in time past; yet the first thing he did on entering the sacred place was to utter a falsehood, prompted by distrust, prompted by the feeling that the pledged protection of the God of truth, before whose shrine he now stood, was not sufficient. How plain the connection between a deficient sense of God's truthfulness, and a deficient regard to truth itself! What could have tempted David to act thus? According to some, it was altogether an amiable and generous desire to keep Ahimelech out of trouble, to screen him from the responsibility of helping a known outlaw. But considering the gathering distrust of David's spirit at the time, it seems more likely that he was startled at the fear which Ahimelech expressed when he saw David coming alone, as if all were not right between him and Saul, as if the truce that had been agreed on after the affair of Naioth had now come to an end. Probably David felt that if Ahimelech knew all, he would be still more afraid, and do nothing to help him; moreover, the presence of Doeg the Edomite was another cause of embarrassment, for Saul had once ordered all his servants to kill David, and if the fierce Edomite were told that David was now simply a fugitive, he might be willing enough to do the deed. Anyhow, David now lent himself to the devices of the father of lies. And so the brave spirit that had not quailed before Goliath, and

that had met the Philistines in so many terrific encounters, now quailed before a phantom of its own devising, and shrank from what, at the moment, was only an imaginary danger.

David succeeded in getting from Ahimelech what he wanted, but not without difficulty. For when David asked for five loaves of bread, the priest replied that he had no common bread, but only shewbread; he had only the bread that had been taken that day from off the table on which it stood before the Lord, and replaced by fresh bread, according to the law. The priest was willing to give that bread to David, if he could assure him that his attendants were not under defilement. It will be remembered that our Lord adverted to this fact, as a justification of His own disciples for plucking the ears of corn and eating them on the Sabbath. The principle underlying both was, that when a ceremonial obligation comes into collision with a moral duty, the lesser obligation is to give place to the heavier. The keeping of the Sabbath free from all work, and the appropriation of the shewbread to the use of the priests alone, were but ceremonial obligations; the preservation of life was a moral duty. It is sometimes a very difficult thing to determine duty, when moral obligations appear to clash with each other, but there was no difficulty in the collision of the moral and the ceremonial. Our Lord would certainly not have sided with that body of zealots, in the days of conflict between the Maccabees and the Syrians, who allowed themselves to be cut in pieces by the enemy, rather than break the Sabbath by fighting on that day.

David had another request to make of Ahimelech. "Is there not here under thy hand spear or sword? for I have neither brought my sword nor my weapons

with me, because the king's business required haste." It was a strange place to ask for military weapons. Surely the priests would not need to defend themselves with these. Yet it happened that there was a sword there which David knew well, and which he might reasonably claim,—the sword of Goliath. "Give it me," said David; "there is none like that." We read before, that David carried Goliath's head to Jerusalem. Nob was evidently in the Jerusalem district, and as the sword was there, there can be little doubt that it was at Nob the trophies had been deposited.

So far, things had gone fairly well with David at Nob. But there was a man there "detained before the Lord,"—prevented probably from proceeding on his journey because it was the Sabbath day,—whose presence gave no comfort to David, and was, indeed, an omen of evil. Doeg, the Edomite, was the chief of the herdmen of Saul. Why Saul had entrusted that office to a member of a nation that was notorious for its bitter feelings towards Israel, we do not know; but the herdman seems to have been like his master in his feelings towards David; he would appear, indeed, to have joined the hereditary dislike of his nation to the personal dislike of his master. Instinctively, as we learn afterwards, David understood the feelings of Doeg. It would have been well for him, when a shudder passed over him as he caught the scowling countenance of the Edomite, had his own conscience been easier than it was. It would have been well for him had he been ruled by that spirit of trust which triumphed so gloriously the day he first got possession of that sword. It would have been well for him had he been free from the disturbing consciousness of having offended God by borrowing the devices of the father of lies and

bringing them into the sanctuary, to pollute the air of the house of God. No wonder, though, David was restless again! "And David arose, and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath."

How different his state and prospects now from what they had been a little time before! Then the world smiled on him; fame and honour, wealth and glory, flowed in on him; God was his Father; conscience was calm; he hardly knew the taste of misery. But how has his sky become overcast! A homeless and helpless wanderer, with scarcely an attendant or companion; in momentary fear of death; fain to beg a morsel of bread where he could get it; a creature so banned and cursed that kindness to him involved the risk of death; his heart bleeding for the loss of Jonathan; his soul clouded by distrust of God; his conscience troubled by the vague sense of unacknowledged sin! And yet he is destined to be king of Israel, the very ideal of a good and prosperous monarch, and the earthly type of the Son of God! Like a lost sheep, he has gone astray for a time, but the Good Shepherd will leave the ninety-and-nine and go among the mountains till He find him; and his experience will give a wondrous depth to that favourite song of young and old of every age and country, "*He restoreth my soul:* He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for His name's sake."

And now we must follow him to Gath, the city of Goliath. Down the slope of Mount Olivet, across the brook Kedron, and past the stronghold of Zion, and probably through the very valley of Elah where he had fought with the giant, David makes his way to Gath. It was surely a strange place to fly to, a sign of the despair in which David found himself! What reception

could the conqueror of Goliath expect in his city? What retribution was due to him for the hundred foreskins, and for the deeds of victory which had inspired the Hebrew singers when they sang of the tens of thousands whom David had slain?

It will hardly do to say that he reckoned on not being recognised. It is more likely that he relied on a spirit not unknown among barbarous princes towards warriors dishonoured at home, as when Themistocles took refuge among the Persians, or Coriolanus among the Volscians. That he took this step without much reflection on its ulterior bearings is well nigh certain. For, granting that he should be favourably received, this would be on the understanding that his services would be at the command of his protector, or at the very least it would place him under an obligation of gratitude that would prove highly embarrassing at some future time. Happily, the scheme did not succeed. The jealousy of the Philistine nobles was excited. "The servants of Achish said unto him, Is not this David, the king of the land? Did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?" David began to feel himself in a false position. He laid up these words in his heart, and was sore afraid of Achish. The misery of his situation and the poverty of his resources may both be inferred from the unworthy device to which he resorted to extricate himself from his difficulty. He feigned himself mad, and conducted himself as madmen commonly do. "He scrabbled on the door of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard." But the device failed. "Have I need of madmen," asked the king, "that ye have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? shall this

fellow come into my house ?" A Jewish tradition alleges that both the wife and daughter of Achish were mad; he had plenty of that sort of people already: no need of more! The title of the thirty-fourth Psalm tells us, "he drove him away, and he departed."

Have any of you ever been tempted to resort to a series of devices and deceits either to avoid a danger or to attain an object? Have you been tempted to forsake the path of straightforward honesty and truth, and to pretend that things were different with you from what they really were? I do not accuse you of that wickedness which they commit who deliberately imprison conscience, and fearlessly set up their own will and their own interests as their king. What you have done under the peculiar circumstances in which you found yourselves is not what you would ordinarily have done. In this one connection, you felt pressed to get along in one way or another, and the only available way was that of deceit and device. You were very unhappy at the beginning, and your misery increased as you went on. Everything about you was in a constrained, unnatural condition,—conscience, temper feelings, all out of order. At one time it seemed as if you were going to succeed; you were on the crest of a wave that promised to bear you to land, but the wave broke, and you were sent floundering in the broken water. You were obliged to go from device to device, with a growing sense of misery. At last the chain snapped, and both you and your friends were confronted with the miserable reality. But know this: that it would have been infinitely worse for you if your device had succeeded than that it failed. If it had succeeded, you would have been permanently entangled in evil principles and evil ways, that would have ruined your

soul. Because you failed, God showed that He had not forsaken you. David prospering at Gath would have been a miserable spectacle; David driven away by Achish is on the way to brighter and better days.

For, if we can accept the titles of some of the Psalms, it would seem that the carnal spell, under which David had been for some time, burst when Achish drove him away, and that he returned to his early faith and trust. It was to the cave of Adullam that he fled, and the hundred and forty-second Psalm claims to have been written there. So also the thirty-fourth Psalm, as we have seen, bears to have been written "when he changed his behaviour" (feigned madness) "before Abimelech" (Achish?), "who drove him away, and he departed." So much uncertainty has been thrown of late years on these superscriptions, that we dare not trust to them explicitly; yet recognising in them at least the value of old traditions, we may regard them as more or less probable, especially when they seem to agree with the substance of the Psalms themselves. With reference to the thirty-fourth, we miss something in the shape of confession of sin, such as we should have expected of one whose lips had *not* been kept from speaking guile. In other respects the psalm fits the situation. The image of the young lions roaring for their prey might very naturally be suggested by the wilderness. But the chief feature of the psalm is the delightful evidence it affords of the blessing that comes from trustful fellowship with God. And there is an expression that seems to imply that that blessing had not been *always* enjoyed by the Psalmist; he had lost it once; but there came a time when (ver. 4) "I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears." And the experience of that new

time was so delightful that the Psalmist had resolved that he would always be on that tack: "I will bless the Lord *at all times;* His praise shall *continually* be in my mouth." How changed the state of his spirit from the time when he feigned madness at Gath! When he asks, "What man is he that desireth life and loveth many days that he may see good?" (ver. 12)—what man would fain preserve his life from harassing anxiety and bewildering dangers?—the prompt reply is, "Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile." Have nothing to do with shifts and pretences and false devices; be candid and open, and commit all to God. "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him O fear the Lord, *ye His saints*" (for you too are liable to forsake the true confidence), "for there is no want to them that fear Him. The young lions do lack and suffer hunger, but they that seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing. The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. . . . Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivereth them out of them all."

"The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me; I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord: O Lord, I beseech Thee, deliver my soul. Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful. The Lord preserveth the simple; I was brought low, and He helped me. Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee" (Psalm cxvi. 3-7).

CHAPTER XXIX.

DAVID AT ADULLAM, MIZPEH, AND HARETH.

1 Samuel xxii.

THE cave of Adullam, to which David fled on leaving Gath, has been placed in various localities even in modern times; but as the Palestine Exploration authorities have placed the town in the valley of Elah, we may regard it as settled that the cave lay there, not far indeed from the place where David had had his encounter with Goliath. It was a humble dwelling for a king's son-in-law, nor could David have thought of needing it on the memorable day when he did such wonders with his sling and stone. These "dens and caves of the earth"—effects of great convulsions in some remote period of its history—what service have they often rendered to the hunted and oppressed! How many a devout saint, of whom the world was not worthy, has blessed God for their shelter! With how much purer devotion and loftier fellowship, with how much more sublime and noble exercises of the human spirit have many of them been associated, than some of the proudest and costliest temples that have been reared in name—often little more—to the service of God!

If David at first was somewhat an object of jealousy to his own family in this the day of his trials they

showed a different spirit. "When his brethren and all his father's house heard of it, they went down thither to him." As the proverb says, "Blood is thicker than water," and often adversity draws families together between whom prosperity has been like a wedge. If our relations are prospering while we are poor, we think of them as if they had moved away from us; but when their fortunes are broken, and the world turns its back on them, we get closer, our sympathy revives. We think all the better of David's family that when they heard of his outlaw condition they all went down to him. Besides these, "every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them; and there were with him about four hundred men." The account here given of the circumstances of this band is not very flattering, but there are two things connected with it to be borne in mind: in the first place, that the kind of men who usually choose the soldier's calling are not your men of plodding industry, but men who shrink from monotonous labour; and, in the second place, that under the absolute rule of Saul there might be many very worthy persons in debt and discontented and in distress, men who had come into that condition because they were not so ready to cringe to despotism as their ruler desired. Mixed and motley therefore though David's troop may have been, it was far from contemptible; and their adherence was fitted greatly to encourage him, because it showed that public feeling was with him, that his cause was not looked on as desperate, that his standard was one to which it was deemed safe and hopeful to resort.

But if, at the first glance, the troop appeared some-

what disreputable, it was soon joined by two men, the one a prophet, the other a priest, whose adherence must have brought to it a great accession of moral weight. The prophet was Gad (ver. 5), who next to Samuel seems to have stood highest in the nation as a man of God, a man of holy counsel, and elevated, heavenly character. His open adherence to David (which seems to be implied in ver. 5) must have had the best effects both on David himself and on the people at large. It must have been a great blessing to David to have such a man as Gad beside him; for, with all his personal piety, he seems to have required a godly minister at his side. No man derived more benefit from the communion of saints, or was more apt to suffer for want of it; for, as we have seen, he had begun to decline in spirituality when he left Samuel at Naioth, and still more when he was parted from Jonathan. When Gad joined him, David must have felt that he was sent to him from the Lord, and could not but be full of gratitude for so conspicuous an answer to his prayers. It would seem that Gad remained in close relation to David to the close of his life. It was he that came from the Lord to offer him his choice between three forms of chastisement after his offence in numbering the people; and from the fact of his being called "David's seer" (2 Sam. xxiv. 11) we conclude that he and David were intimately associated. It was he also that instructed David to buy the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite, and thus to consecrate to God a spot with which, to the very end of time, the most hallowed thoughts must always be connected.

The other eminent person that joined David about this time was Abiathar the priest. But before adverting to this, we must follow the thread of the narrative

and especially note the tragedy that occurred at Nob, the city of the priests.

From the mode of life which David had to follow and the difficulty of obtaining subsistence for his troop at one place for any length of time, he was obliged to make frequent changes. On leaving the cave of Adullam, which was near the western border of the tribe of Judah, he traversed the whole breadth of that tribe, and crossing the Jordan, came to the territories of Moab. He was concerned for the safety of his father and mother, knowing too well the temper of Eastern kings, and how they thirsted for the blood, not only of their rivals, but of all their relations. He feared that they would not be let alone at Bethlehem or in any other part of Saul's kingdom. But what led him to think of the king of Moab? Perhaps a tender remembrance of his ancestress Ruth, the damsel from Moab, who had been so eminent for her devotion to her mother-in-law. Might there not be found in the king of Moab somewhat of a like disposition, that would look with pity on an old man and woman driven from their home, not indeed, like Naomi, by famine, but by what was even worse, the shameful ingratitude and murderous fury of a wicked king? If such was David's hope, it was not without success; his father and his mother dwelt with the king of Moab all the time that David was in the hold.

But it was not God's purpose that David should lurk in a foreign land. The prophet Gad directed him to return to the land of Judah. It was within the boundaries of that tribe, accordingly, that the rest of David's exile was spent, with the exception of the time at the very end when he again resorted to Philistine territory. His first hiding-place was the forest of Hareth.

While David was here, Saul, encamped in military

state at Gibeah, delivered an extraordinary speech to the men of his own tribe. "Hear now, ye Benjamites; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds; that all of you have conspired against me, and there is none that showeth me that my son hath made a league with the son of Jesse, and there is none of you that is sorry for me, or that showeth me that my son hath stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day?" It would have been difficult for any other man to condense so much that was vile in spirit into the dimensions of a little speech like this. It begins with a base appeal to the cupidity of his countrymen, the Benjamites, among whom he was probably in the habit of distributing the possessions of his enemies, as, for instance, the Gibeonites, who dwelt near him, and whom he slew, contrary to the covenant made with them by Joshua (2 Sam. xxi. 2). It accuses his people of having conspired against him, because they had not spoken to him of the friendship of his son with David, although that fact must have been notorious. It accuses the noble Jonathan of having stirred up David against Saul, while neither Jonathan nor David had ever lifted a little finger against him, and both the one and the other might have been trusted to serve him with unflinching fidelity if he had only given them a fair chance. It indicates that nothing would be more agreeable to Saul than any information about David or those connected with him that would give him an excuse for some deed of overwhelming vengeance. Did ever man draw his own portrait in viler colours than Saul in this speech?

There was one bosom—let us hope only one—in which it awoke a response. It was that of Doeg the

Edomite. He told the story of what he had seen at Nob, adding thereto the unfounded statement that Ahimelech had inquired of the Lord for David. Ahimelech and the whole college of priests were accordingly sent for, and they came. The charge brought against him was a very offensive one; in so far, it was a statement of facts, but of facts placed in an odious light, of facts coloured with a design which Ahimelech never entertained. Oh, how many an innocent man has suffered in this way! Even in courts of justice, by pleaders whose interest is on the other side, and sometimes by judges (like Jeffreys) steeped in hatred and prejudice, how often have acts that were quite innocent been put to the account of treason, or put to the account of malice, or cunningly forged into a chain, indicating a deliberate design to injure another! It can never be too earnestly insisted on that to be just to a man you must not merely ascertain the real facts of his case, but you must put the facts in their true light, and not colour them with prejudices of your own or with suppositions which the man repudiates.

The conduct of Ahimelech was manly and straightforward, but indiscreet. He admitted the facts, with the exception of the statement that he had inquired of the Lord for David. He vindicated right manfully the faithful, noble services of David, services that ought to have excluded the very idea of treason or conspiracy. He protested that he knew nothing of any ground the king had against David, or of any cause that could have led him to believe that in helping him he was offending Saul. But just because Ahimelech's defence was so true and so complete, it was most offensive to Saul. What is there a despot likes worse to hear than that he is entirely in the wrong? What words

irritate him so much as those which prove the entire innocence of some one with whom he is angry? Saul was angry both with David and with Ahimelech. Ahimelech had the great misfortune to prove to him that in both cases there was no shadow of ground for his anger. In proportion as Saul's reason should have been satisfied, his temper was excited. What an uncontrollable condition that temper must have been in when the death of Ahimelech was decreed, and all his father's house! We do not wonder that no one could be found in his bodyguard to execute the order. Did this not stagger and sober the king? Far from it. His fit of rage was so hot and imperious that he would not be baulked. Turning to Doeg, he commanded him to fall on the priests. And this vile man had the brutality to execute the order, and to plunge his sword into the heart of fourscore and five unarmed persons that wore the garments which even in heathen nations usually secured protection and safety. And as if it were not enough to kill the men, their city, Nob, was utterly destroyed. Men and women, children and sucklings, oxen and asses and sheep—a thorough massacre was made of them all. Had Nob been a city of warriors that had resisted the king's armies with haughty insolence, harassed them by sorties, entrapped them by stratagems, and exasperated them by hideous cruelty to their prisoners, but at last been overpowered, it could not have had a more terrible doom. And had Saul never committed any other crime, this would have been enough to separate him from the Lord for ever, and to bring down on him the horrors of the night at Endor and of the day that followed on Mount Gilboa.

This cruel and sacrilegious murder must have told

against Saul and his cause with prodigious effect. There could not have been a single priest or Levite throughout the kingdom whose blood would not boil at the news of the massacre, and whose sympathies would not be enlisted, more or less, on behalf of David, now openly proclaimed by Saul as his rival, and probably known to have been anointed by Samuel as his successor. Not only the priests and Levites, but every rightminded man throughout the land would share in this feeling, and many a prayer would be offered for David that God would protect him, and spare him to be a blessing to his country. The very presence in his camp of Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech, who escaped the massacre, with his ephod,—an official means of consulting God in all cases of difficulty,—would be a visible proof to his followers and to the community at large, that God was on his side. And when the solemn rites of the national worship were performed in his camp, and when, at each turn of public affairs, the high priest was seen in communication with Jehovah, the feeling could not fail to gain strength that David's cause was the cause of God, and the cause of the country, and that, in due time, his patient sufferings and his noble services would be crowned with the due reward.

But if the news of the massacre would tend on the whole to improve David's position with the people, it must have occasioned a terrible pang to David himself. There was, indeed, one point of view in which something of the kind was to be looked for. Long ago, it had been foretold to Eli, when he tolerated so calmly the scandalous wickedness of his sons, "Behold, the days come that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, but there shall not be an old man

in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in My habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thy house for ever." Ahimelech was a grandson of Eli, and the other massacred priests were probably of Eli's blood. Here, then, at last, was the fulfilment of the sentence announced to Eli; doomed as his house had been, their subsistence for years back was of the nature of a respite; and here, at length, was the catastrophe that had been so distinctly foretold.

That consideration, however, would not be much, if any, consolation to David. If the falsehood which he had told to Ahimelech was really dictated by a desire to save the high priest from conscious implication with his affairs—with the condition of one who was now an outlaw and a fugitive, it had failed most terribly of the desire deffect. The issue of the lie only served to place David's duplicity in a more odious light. There is one thing in David, when he received the information, that we cannot but admire—his readiness to take to himself his full share of blame. "I have occasioned the death of all thy father's house." And more than that, he did not even protest that it was impossible to have foreseen what was going to happen. For at the very time when he was practising the falsehood on Ahimelech, he owns that he had a presentiment of mischief to follow. "I knew it that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul." Nor did he excuse himself on the ground that the massacre was the fulfilment of the longstanding sentence on Eli's house He knew well that that circumstance in no degree lessened his own guilt, or the guilt of Doeg and Saul. Though God may use men's wicked passions to bring about His purposes, that in no degree

lessens the guilt of these passions. It seems as if David never could have forgiven himself his share in this dreadful business. And what a warning this conveys to us! Are you not sometimes tempted to think that sin to you is not a very serious matter, because you will get forgiveness for it, the atoning work of the Saviour will cleanse you from its guilt? Be it so; but what if your sin has involved others, and if no atoning blood has been sprinkled on them? What of the youth whom your careless example first led to drink, and who died a miserable drunkard? What of the clerk whom you instructed to tell a lie? What of the companion of your sensuality whom you drove nearer to hell? Alas, alas! sin is like a network, the ramifications of which go out on the right hand and on the left, and when we break God's law, we cannot tell what the consequences to others may be! And how can we be ever comforted if we have been the occasion of ruin to any? It seems as if the burden of that feeling could never be borne; as if the only way of escape were, to be put out of existence altogether!

The superscription of the fifty-second Psalm bears—"Maschil of David; when Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul, David is come to the house of Ahimelech." There is not much in this title to recommend it, as the information that was given by Doeg to Saul is not stated accurately. We might have expected, too, that if Doeg was alone in the Psalmist's eye, the atrocious slaughter of the priests would have had a share of reprobation, as well as the sharp, calumnious, mischievous tongue which is the chief object of denunciation. And though Doeg, as the chief of Saul's bondmen, might be a rich man, that position would hardly have entitled him to be

called a mighty man, nor to assume the swaggering tone of independence here ascribed to him. Whoever was really the object of denunciation in this psalm, seems however to have belonged to the same class with Doeg, in respect of his wicked tongue and love of mischief. It is indeed a wretched character that is delineated: the Psalmist's enemy is at once mischievous and mighty; and not only is he mischievous, but he boasts himself in it. He is shameless and without conscience, bent on doing all the evil that he can. Let him only have a chance of bringing a railing accusation against God's servants, and he does it with delight. But his conduct is senseless as it is wicked. God is unchangeably good, and His goodness is a sure defence to His servants against all the calumnious devices of the greatest and strongest of men. It is the tongue of this evil man that is his instrument of mischief. It is utterly unscrupulous, sharp as a razor, cunning, devouring. A liar is a serious enemy, one who is utterly unprincipled, clever withal, and who trains himself with great skill to do mischief with his tongue. It is painful to be at the mercy of a calumniator who does not launch against you a clumsy and incredible calumny, but one that has an element of probability in it, only fearfully distorted. Especially when the calumniator is one that *deviseth* mischief, who loves evil more than good, to whom truth is too tame to be cared for, who delights in falsehood because it is more piquant, more exciting. To those who have learned to regard it as the great business of life to spread light, order, peace, and joy, such men appear to be monsters, and indeed they are; but it is a painful experience to lie at their mercy.

To this class belonged Doeg, a monster in human

form, to whom it was no distress, but apparently a congenial employment, to murder in cold blood a very hecatomb of men consecrated to the service of God. No doubt it would appal David to think that such a man was now leagued with Saul as his bitter and implacable enemy. But his faith saw him in the same prostrate position in which his faith had seen Goliath. Men cannot defy God in vain. Men dare not defy that truth and that mercy which are attributes of God. "God shall likewise destroy thee for ever: He shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling-place, and root thee out of the land of the living. The righteous also shall see, and fear, and shall laugh at him."

What became of Doeg we do not know. The historian does not introduce his name again. Before David came to power, he had probably received his doom. Had he still survived, we should have been likely again to fall in with his name. The Jews have a tradition that he was Saul's armour-bearer at the battle of Gilboa, and that the sword by which he and his master fell, was no other than that which had slain the priests of the Lord. As for the truth of this we cannot say. But even supposing that no special judgment befel him, we cannot fancy him as other than a most miserable man. With such a heart and such a tongue, with the load of a guilty life lying heavy on his soul, and that life crowned by such an infamous proceeding as the massacre of the priests, we cannot think of him as one who enjoyed life, but as a man of surly and gloomy nature, to whom life grew darker and darker, till it was extinguished in some miserable ending. In contrast with such a career, how bright and how much to be desired was David's anticipated future:—"I am like a green olive-tree in the

house of my God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever. I will praise Thy name for ever, because Thou hast done it: and I will wait on Thy name, for it is good before Thy saints."

"Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about."

CHAPTER XXX.

DAVID AT KEILAH, ZIPH, AND MAON.

1 Samuel xxiii.

THE period of David's life shortly sketched in this chapter, must have been full of trying and exciting events. If we knew all the details, they would probably be full of romantic interest; many a tale of privation, disease, discomfort, on the one hand, and of active conflicts and hair-breadth escapes on the other. The district which he frequented was a mountainous tract, bordering on the west coast of the Dead Sea, and lying exposed more or less to the invasions of the neighbouring nations. In the immediate neighbourhood of Ziph, Maon, and Carmel, the country—a fine upland plain—is remarkably rich and fertile; but between these places and the Dead Sea it changes to a barren wilderness; the rocky valleys that run down to the margin of the sea, parched by the heat and drought, produce only a dry stunted grass. Innumerable caves are everywhere to be seen, still affording shelter to outlaws and robbers. But at Engedi (now Ain-Jidy, "the fountain of the goat"), the last place mentioned in this chapter, the traveller finds a little plain on the shore of the Dead Sea, where the soil is remarkably rich; a delicious fountain fertilizes it; shut in between walls of rock, both its climate and its products are like

those of the tropics; it only wants cultivation to render it a most prolific spot.

By what means did David obtain sustenance for himself and his large troop in these sequestered regions? Bayle, in the article in his famous Dictionary on "David,"—an article which gave the cue to much that has been said and written against him since,—speaks of them as a troop of robbers, and compares them to the associates of Catiline, and even Dean Stanley calls them "freebooters." Both expressions are obviously unwarranted. The only class of persons whom David and his troop regarded as enemies were the open enemies of his country,—that is, either persons who lived by plunder, or the tribes on whom Saul, equally with himself, would have made war. That David regarded himself as entitled to attack and pillage the Hebrew settlers in his own tribe of Judah is utterly inconsistent with all that we know both of his character and of his history. If David had a weakness, it lay in his extraordinary partiality for his own people, contrasted with his hard and even harsh feelings towards the nations that so often annoyed them. Nothing was too good for a Hebrew, nothing too severe for an alien. In after life, we see how his heart was torn to its very centre by the judgment that fell upon his people after his offence in numbering the people (2 Sam. xxiv. 17); while the record of his severity to the Ammonites cannot be read without a shudder (2 Sam. xii. 31). Besides, in this very narrative, in the account of his collision with Nabal (1 Sam. xxv. 7), we find David putting in the very forefront of his message to the churl the fact that all the time he and his troop were in Carmel the shepherds of Nabal sustained no hurt, and his flocks no diminution. Instead of fleecing

his own countrymen, he sent them presents when he was more successful than usual against their common foes (1 Sam. xxx. 26). Unquestionably therefore such terms as "robbers" and "freebooters" are quite undeserved.

One chief source of support would obviously be the chase—the wild animals that roamed among these mountains, the wild goat and the coney, the pigeon and the partridge, and other creatures whose flesh was clean. Possibly, patches of soil, like the oasis at Engedi, would be cultivated, and a scanty return obtained from the labour. A third employment would be that of guarding the flocks of the neighbouring shepherds both from bears, wolves, and lions, and from the attacks of plundering bands, for which service some acknowledgment was certainly due. At the best, it was obviously a most uncomfortable mode of life, making not a little rough work very necessary; an utter contrast to the peaceful early days of Bethlehem, and rendering it infinitely more difficult to sing, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

Acting as guardian to the shepherds in the neighbourhood, and being the avowed foe of all the Arab tribes who were continually making forays from their desert haunts on the land of Judah, David was in the very midst of enemies. Hence probably the allusions in some of the psalms. "Consider mine enemies, for they are many, and they hate me with cruel hatred." "Mine enemies would daily swallow me up, for there be many that fight against me, O Thou Most High." "My soul is among lions, and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men whose teeth are spears and arrows and their tongue a sharp sword." Could we know all his trials and difficulties, we should be amazed at his

tranquillity. One morning, an outpost brings him word that Saul is marching against him. He hastily arranges a retreat, and he and his men clamber over the mountains, perhaps under a burning sun, and reach their halting-place at night, exhausted with thirst, hunger, and fatigue. Scarcely have they lain down, when an alarm is given that a body of Bedouins are plundering the neighbouring sheepfolds. Forgetful of their fatigues, they rush to their arms, pursue the invaders, and rescue the prey. Next morning, perhaps, the very men whose flock he had saved, refuse to make him any acknowledgment. Murmurs rise from his hungry followers, and a sort of mutiny is threatened if he will not allow them to help themselves. To crown all, he learns by-and-bye, that the people whom he has delivered have turned traitors and are about to give him up to Saul. Wonderful was the faith that could rise above such troubles, and say, "Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord, for He shall pluck my feet out of the net."

In illustration of these remarks let us note first what took place in connection with Keilah. This was a place of strength and importance not far from the land of the Philistines. A rumour reaches him that the Philistines are fighting against it and robbing the threshing-floors. The first thing he does, on hearing this rumour, is to inquire of God whether he should go and attack the Philistines. It is not a common case. The Philistines were a powerful enemy; probably their numbers were large, and it was a serious thing for David to provoke them when he had so many enemies besides. This was evidently the feeling of his followers. "Behold, we be afraid here in Judah: how much more then if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?" But David is in an admirable frame of mind, and his only

anxiety is about knowing precisely the will of God. He inquires again, and when he gets his answer he does not hesitate an instant. It was about this time that Abiathar the son of Ahimelech came to him, bringing an ephod from Nob, perhaps the only sacred thing that in the hurry and horror of his flight he was able to carry away. And now, in his time of need, David finds the value of these things; he knows the privilege of fearing God, and of having God at his right hand. The fears of his men appear now to be overcome; he goes to Keilah, attacks the Philistines, smites them with a very great slaughter, brings away their cattle and rescues the people. It is a great deliverance, and David, with peace and plenty around him, and the benedictions of the men of Keilah, breathes freely and praises God.

But his sense of ease and tranquillity was of short duration. Saul hears of what has taken place, and hears that David has taken up his quarters within the town of Keilah. He chuckles over the news with fiendish satisfaction, for Keilah is a fortified town; he will be able to shut up David within its walls and lay siege to the place, and when he has taken it, David will be at his mercy. But Saul, as usual, reckons without his host. David has received information that leads him to suspect that Saul is meditating mischief against him, and it looks as if he had come to Keilah only to fall into a trap,—to fall into the hands of Saul. But though a new danger has arisen, the old refuge still remains. "Bring hither the ephod," he says to Abiathar. And communication being again established with Heaven, two questions are asked: Will Saul come down to Keilah, to destroy the city for David's sake? Yes, he will. Will the men of Keilah whom David has saved

from the Philistines distinguish themselves for their gratitude or for their treachery? They will become traitors; they will deliver David up to Saul. So there is nothing for it but for David to escape from Keilah. The worst of it is, he has no other place to go to. He goes forth from Keilah, as his father Abraham went forth from Ur of the Chaldees, not knowing whither. He and his followers went "whithersoever they could go." Treachery was a new foe, and when the treachery was on the part of those on whom he had just conferred a signal benefit, it was most discouraging; it seemed to indicate that he could never be safe.

Flying from Keilah, he takes refuge in a part of the wilderness near Ziph. Being very rocky and mountainous, it affords good opportunities for hiding; but in proportion as it is advantageous for that purpose, it is unfavourable for getting sufficient means of subsistence. A wood in the neighbourhood of Ziph afforded the chance of both. In this wood David enjoys the extraordinary privilege of a meeting with Jonathan. What a contrast to his treatment from the men of Keilah! If, on turning his back on them, he was disposed to say, "All men are liars," the blessed generosity of Jonathan modifies the sentiment. In such circumstances, the cheering words of his friend and the warmth of his embrace must have come on David with infinite satisfaction. They were to him what the loving words of the dying thief were to the Saviour, amid the babel and blasphemy of Calvary. Who, indeed, does not see in the David of this time, persevering in his work under such fearful discouragements, under the treachery of men with hearts like Judas Iscariot, experiencing the worst treatment from some whom he had benefited already, and from others

whom he was to benefit still more—who can fail to see the type of Christ, patiently enduring the cross at the hands and in the stead of the very men whom by His sufferings He was to save and bless? For David, like our blessed Lord, though not with equal steadfastness, drinks the cup which the Father has given him; he holds to the work which has been given him to do.

The brief note of Jonathan's words to David in the wood is singularly beautiful and suggestive. "Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said unto him, Fear not; for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee, and that also Saul my father knoweth." To begin with the last of Jonathan's words, what a lurid light they throw on the conduct of Saul! He was under no misapprehension as to the Divine destiny of David. He must have known therefore that in fighting against David, he was fighting against God. It looks unaccountable madness; yet what worse is it than a thousand other schemes in which, to carry out their ends, men have trampled on every moral precept, as if there were no God, no lawgiver, ruler, or judge above, no power in hell or heaven witnessing their actions to bring them all into judgment?

In his words to David the faith and piety of Jonathan were as apparent as his friendship. He strengthened his hand in God. Simple but beautiful words! He put David's hand as it were into God's hand, in token that they were one, in token that the Almighty was pledged to keep and bless him, and that when he and his God were together, no weapon formed against him would ever prosper. Surely no act of

friendship is so true friendship as this. To remind our Christian friends in their day of trouble of their relation to God, to encourage them to think of His interest in them and His promises to them; to drop in their ear some of His assurances—"I will never leave thee nor forsake thee,"—is surely the best of all ways to encourage the downcast, and send them on their way rejoicing.

And what a hallowed word that was with which Jonathan began his exhortation—"Fear not." The "fear not's" of Scripture are a remarkable garland. All of them have their root in grace, not in nature. They all imply a firm exercise of faith. And Jonathan's "fear not" was no exception. If David had not been a man of faith, it would have sounded like hollow mockery. "The hand of Saul my father shall not find thee." Was not Saul with his well-equipped force, at that very moment, within a few miles of him, while he, with his half-starved followers was at his very wits' end, not knowing where to turn to next? "Thou shalt be king over Israel." Nay, friend, I should be well pleased, David might have said, if I were again feeding my father's flocks in Bethlehem, with all that has happened since then obliterated, reckoned as if it had never been. "And I shall be next unto thee." O Jonathan, how canst thou say that? Thou art the king's eldest son, the throne ought to be thine, there is none worthier of it; the very fact that thou canst say that to me shows what a kingly generosity is in thy bosom, and how well entitled thou art to reign over Israel! Yes, David, but does not the very fact of Jonathan using such words show that he is in closest fellowship with God? Only a man pervaded through and through by the Spirit of God could speak thus to the person who stands between him and what the

world would call his reasonable ambition. In that spirit of Jonathan there is a goodness altogether Divine. Oh what a contrast to his father, to Saul! What a contrast to the ordinary spirit of jealousy, when some one is like to cut us out of a coveted prize! Some one at school is going to beat you at the competition. Some one in business is going to get the situation for which you are so eager. Some one is going to carry off the fair hand to which you so ardently aspire. Where, oh where, in such cases, is the spirit of Jonathan? Look at it, study it, admire it; and in its clear and serene light, see what a black and odious spirit jealousy is; and oh, seek that *you*, by the grace of God, may be, not a Saul, but a Jonathan!

It would appear that Saul had left the neighbourhood of Ziph in despair of finding David, and had returned to Gibeah. But the distance was small—probably not more than a long day's journey. And after a time, Saul is recalled to Ziph by a message from the Ziphites. "Then came up the Ziphites to Saul to Gibeah, saying, Doth not David hide himself with us in strong holds in the woods, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon? Now therefore, O king, come down according to all the desire of thy soul to come down; and our part shall be to deliver him into the king's hand." The men of Keilah had not gone the length of treachery, for when they were thinking of it, David escaped; but even if they had, they would have had something to say for themselves. Was it not better to give up David and let him suffer, than to keep him in their city, and let both him and them and their city share the fate, as they would have been sure to do, of Ahimelech and the city of Nob,—that is, be utterly destroyed? But the men of Ziph were in no such dilemma. Their

treachery was simple meanness. They no doubt wished to ingratiate themselves with Saul. They had no faith either in David, or in God's promises regarding him. Disbelieving God, they acted inhumanly to man. They let Saul know his best opportunity, and when he came on the spot, apparently of a sudden, David and his troop were surrounded, and their escape seemed to be cut off. Here was a strange commentary on the strong assurance of Jonathan, "Saul my father shall not find thee." Has he not found me, only to too good purpose? But man's extremity is God's opportunity. When Saul seems ready to pounce on David, a messenger arrives, "Haste thee, and come, for the Philistines have invaded the land." The danger was imminent, and Saul could not afford to lose an hour. And thus, on the very eve of seizing the prey he had been hunting for years, he is compelled to let it go.

It is edifying to observe all the different ways in which the Divine protection toward David had been shown, all the time that he had been exposed to the hostility of Saul. First of all, when Saul spoke to his servants and to Jonathan that they should kill David, Jonathan was raised up to take his side, and by his friendly counsels, arrested for the time the murderous purpose of Saul. Next, when Saul hurled a javelin at David, a rapid movement saved his life. The third time, he was let down through a window by his wife, in time to escape. The fourth time, the messengers that were sent to apprehend him were filled with the Spirit of God, and even Saul, determined to make up for their lack of service, underwent the same transformation. The fifth time, when he was in Keilah, he was supernaturally warned of the unkind treachery of the men of Keilah, and thus escaped the snare. And

now, a sixth escape is effected, in the very article of death, so to speak, by a Philistine invasion. Thus was illustrated that wonderful diversity of plan that characterises the ways of God, that "variety in unity" which we may trace alike in the kingdom of nature, of providence, and of grace. A similar variety is seen in His deliverances of Israel. At one time the sea is divided, at another the sun stands still; Gideon delivers by lamps and pitchers, Shamgar by his ox-goad, Samson by the jawbone of an ass, Jephthah by his military talents, David by his sling and stone, Daniel by his skill in dreams, Esther by her beauty and power of fascination. To remember such things ought to give you confidence in times of perplexity and danger. If it be God's purpose to deliver you, He has thousands of unseen methods, to any one of which He may resort, when, to the eye of sense, there seems not the shadow of a hope. And one reason why He seems at times to doom His children to inevitable ruin, is that He may call their faith and their patience into higher exercise, and teach them more impressively the sublime lesson—"Stand still, and see the salvation of God."

The fifty-fourth Psalm bears an inscription that would refer it to this occasion. There are some expressions in the psalm that hardly agree with this reference; but the general situation is quite in keeping with it. "Save me, O God," the Psalmist cries, "by Thy name, and judge me by Thy strength." The danger from which he needs to be saved comes from strangers that are risen up against him, and opposers that seek after his soul; persons "that have not set God before them." To be saved by God's *name* is to be saved through attributes which are manifestly Divine; to be judged by God's *strength*, is to be

vindicated, to be shown to be under God's favour and protection, by the manifest exercise of His power. The petitions are such as David might well have made after his conversation with Jonathan. The psalm is evidently the song of one whose hand had been "strengthened in God." Its great central truth is, "God is mine helper; the Lord is with them who (like Jonathan) uphold my soul." And there comes after that a happy exercise of the spirit of trust, enabling the Psalmist to say, "He hath delivered me out of all trouble." This result is wonderful and beautiful. How remarkable that in that wilderness of Judah, amid a life of hardship, exposure, and peril, with a powerful king thirsting for his blood, and using his every device to get hold of him, he should be able to say of God, "He hath delivered me out of all trouble." It is the faith that removes mountains: it is the faith that worked so wonderfully when the lad with the sling and stones went out so bravely against the giant. What wonders cannot faith perform when it gets clear of all the entanglements of carnal feeling, and stands, firm and erect, on the promise of God! How infinitely would such a faith relieve and sustain us in the common troubles and anxieties of life, and in deeper perplexities connected with the cause of God! Take this short clause as marking out the true quality and highest attainment of simple faith, and resolve that you will not rest in your own endeavours till your mind reaches the state of tranquillity which it describes so simply,—"He hath delivered me out of all trouble."

CHAPTER XXXI.

DAVID TWICE SPARES THE LIFE OF SAUL.

1 Samuel xxiv., xxvi.

THE invasion of the Philistines had freed David from the fear of Saul for a time, but only for a time. He knew full well that when the king of Israel had once repelled that invasion he would return to prosecute the object on which his heart was so much set. For a while he took refuge among the rocks of Engedi, that beautiful spot of which we have already spoken, and which has been embalmed in Holy Writ, as suggesting a fair image of the Beloved One—"My beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of Engedi" (Song of Solomon i. 14). The mountains here and throughout the hill country of Judea are mostly of limestone formation, abounding, like all such rocks, in caverns of large size, in which lateral chambers run off at an angle from the main cavity, admitting of course little or no light, but such that a person inside, while himself unseen, may see what goes on at the entrance to the cave. In the dark sides of such a cave, David and his men lay concealed when Saul was observed by him to enter and lie down, probably unattended, to enjoy the mid-day sleep which the heat of the climate often demands. We cannot fail to remark the singular providence that concealed from Saul at

this time the position of David. He had good information of his movements in general; the treacherous spirit which was so prevalent, greatly aided him in this; but on the present occasion, he was evidently in ignorance of his situation. If only he had known, how easy it would have been for him with his three thousand chosen men to blockade the cave, and starve David and his followers into surrender!

The entrance of the king being noticed by David's men, they urged their master to avail himself of the opportunity of getting rid of him which was now so providentially and unexpectedly presented to him. We can hardly think of a stronger temptation to do so than that under which David now lay. In the first place, there was the prospect of getting rid of the weary life he was leading,—more like the life of a wild beast hunted by its enemies, than of a man eager to do good to his fellows, with a keen relish for the pleasures of home and an extraordinary delight in the services of God's house. Then there was the prospect of wearing the crown and wielding the sceptre of Israel,—the splendours of a royal palace, and its golden opportunities of doing good. Further, there was the voice of his followers urging him to the deed, putting on it a sacred character by ascribing to it a Divine permission and appointment. And still further, there was the suddenness and unexpectedness of the opportunity. Nothing is more critical than a sudden opportunity of indulging an ardent passion; with scarcely a moment for deliberation, one is apt to be hurried blindly along, and at once to commit the deed. With all his noble nature, Robert the Bruce could not refrain from plunging his dagger into the heart of the treacherous Comyn, even in the convent of the Minorite friars. The discipline

of David's spirit must at this time have been admirable. Not only did he restrain himself, but he restrained his followers too. He would neither strike his heartless enemy, nor suffer another to strike him. On the first of the two occasions of his sparing him—recorded in the twenty-fourth chapter—he might naturally believe that his forbearance would turn Saul's heart and end the unjust quarrel. On the second occasion of the same sort—recorded in the twenty-sixth chapter—he could have had no hope of the kind. It was a pure sense of duty that restrained him. He acted in utter contempt of what was personal and selfish, and in deepest reverence for what was holy and Divine. How different from the common spirit of the world! Young people, who are so ready to keep up a sense of wrong, and wait an opportunity of paying back your schoolfellows, study this example of David. Ye grown men, who could not get such-a-one to vote for you, or to support your claim in your controversy, and who vowed that you would never rest till you had driven him from the place, how does your spirit compare with that of David? Ye statesmen, who have received an affront from some barbarous people, utterly ignorant of your ways, and who forthwith issue your orders for your ships of war to scatter destruction among their miserable villages, terrifying, killing, mutilating, no matter how many of the wretches that have no arms to meet you in fair fight—think of the forbearance of David. And think too of many passages in the New Testament that give the idea of another treatment and another species of victory:—"Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

The special consideration that held back the arm of David from killing Saul was that he was the Lord's anointed. He held the office of king by Divine appointment,—not merely as other kings may be regarded as holding it, but as God's lieutenant, called specially, and selected for the office. For David to remove him would be to interfere with the Divine prerogative. It would be so much the more inexcusable as God had many other ways of removing him, any one of which He might readily employ. "David said furthermore, As the Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and perish. The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed."

Let us briefly follow the narrative on each of the two occasions.

First, when David saw Saul asleep at the entrance of the cave near Engedi, he crept towards him as he lay, and removed a loose piece of his garment. When Saul rose up and proceeded on his way, David boldly followed him, believing that after sparing the king's life he was safe from attack either from him or his people. His respectful salutation, drawing the king's attention, was followed by an act of profound obeisance. David then addressed Saul somewhat elaborately, his address being wholly directed to the point of disabusing the king's mind of the idea that he had any plot whatever against his life. His words were very respectful but at the same time bold. Taking advantage of the act of forbearance which had just occurred, he demanded of the king why he listened to men's words, saying Behold, David seeketh thy hurt. He protested that for himself nothing would induce him to stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed. That

very day, he had had the chance, but he had forborne. His people had urged him, but he would not comply. *There* was the skirt of his garment which he had just cut off: it would have been as easy for him, when he did that, to plunge his sword into the heart of the king. Could there be a plainer proof that Saul was mistaken in supposing David to be actuated by murderous or other sinful feelings against him? And yet Saul hunted for his life to take it. Rising still higher, David appealed to the great Judge of all, and placed the quarrel in His hands. To vary the case, he quoted a proverb to the effect that only where there was wickedness in the heart could wickedness be found in the life. Then, with the easy play of a versatile mind, he put the case in a comical light: did it become the great king of Israel to bring his hosts after one so insignificant—"after a dead dog, after a flea"? Was ocean to be tossed into tempest "to waft a feather or to drown a straw"? Once more, and to sum up the whole case, he appealed solemnly to God, virtually invoking His blessing on whoever was innocent in this quarrel, and calling down His wrath and destruction on the party that was really guilty.

The effect on Saul was prompt and striking. He was touched in his tenderest feelings by the singular generosity of his opponent. He broke down thoroughly, welcomed the dear voice of David, "lifted up his voice and wept." He confessed that he was wrong, that David had rewarded him good and he had rewarded David evil. David had given him that day a convincing proof of his integrity; though it seemed that the Lord had delivered him into his hand, he killed him not. He had reversed the principle on which men were accustomed to act when they came upon an

enemy, and had him in their power. And all these acknowledgments of David's superior goodness Saul made, while knowing well and frankly owning that David should be the king, and that the kingdom should be established in his hand. One favour only Saul would beg of David in reference to that coming time —that he would not massacre his family, or destroy his name out of his father's house—a request which it was easy for David to comply with. Never would he dream of such a thing, however common it was in these Eastern kingdoms. David sware to Saul, and the two parted in peace.

How glad David must have been that he acted as he did! Already his forbearance has had a full reward. It has drawn out the very best elements of Saul's soul; it has placed Saul in a light in which we can think of him with interest, and even admiration. How can this be the man that so meanly plotted for David's life when he sent him against the Philistines? that gave him his daughter to be his wife in order that he might have more opportunities to entangle him? that flung the murderous javelin at his head? that massacred the priests and destroyed their city simply because they had shown him kindness? Saul is indeed a riddle, all the more that this generous fit lasted but a very short time; and soon after, when the treacherous Ziphites undertook to betray David, Saul and his soldiers came again to the wilderness to destroy him.

It has been thought by some, and with reason, that something more than the varying humour of Saul is necessary to account for his persistent efforts to kill David. And it is believed that a clue to this is supplied by expressions of which David made much use, and by

certain references in the Psalms, which imply that to a great extent he was the victim of calumny, and of calumny of a very malignant and persistent kind. In the address on which we have commented David began by asking why Saul *listened to men's words*, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy life? And in the address recorded in the twenty-sixth chapter (ver. 19) David says very bitterly, "If they be the children of men that have stirred thee up against me, cursed be they before the Lord; for they have driven me out this day from abiding in the inheritance of the Lord, saying, Go, serve other gods." Turning to the seventh Psalm, we find in it a vehement and passionate appeal to God in connection with the bitter and murderous fury of an enemy, who is said in the superscription to have been Cush the Benjamite. The fury of that man against David was extraordinary. Deliver me, O Lord, "lest he tear my soul like a lion, rending it in pieces when there is none to deliver." It is plain that the form of calumny which this man indulged in was accusing David of "rewarding evil to him that was at peace with him," an accusation not only not true, but outrageously contrary to the truth, seeing he had "delivered him that without cause was his enemy." It is not unlikely therefore that at Saul's court David had an enemy who had the bitterest enmity to him, who never ceased to poison Saul's mind regarding him, who put facts in the most offensive light, and even after the first act of David's generosity to Saul not only continued, but continued more ferociously than ever to inflame Saul's mind, and urge him to get rid of this intolerable nuisance. What could have inspired Cush, or indeed any one, with such a hatred to David we cannot definitely say; much of it was due to that instinctive hatred of holy character

which worldly men of strong will show in every age, and perhaps not a little to the apprehension that if David did ever come to the throne, many a wicked man, now fattening on the spoils of the kingdom through the favour of Saul, would be stript of his wealth and consigned to obscurity.

It would seem, then, that had Saul been left alone he would have left David alone. It was the bitter and incessant plotting of David's enemies that stirred him up. Jealousy was only too active a feeling in his breast, and it was easy to work upon it, and fill him with the idea that, after all, David was a rebel and a traitor. These things David must have known; knowing them, he made allowance for them, and did not suffer his heart to become altogether cold to Saul. The kindly feelings which Saul expressed when he dismissed from his view all the calumnies with which he had been poisoned, and looked straight at David, made a deep impression on his rival, and the fruit of them appeared in that beautiful elegy on Saul and Jonathan, which must seem a piece of hypocrisy if the facts we have stated be not kept in view: "Saul and Jonathan were pleasant and lovely in their lives, and in their death they were not divided."

In the second incident, recorded in the twenty-sixth chapter, when David again spared the life of Saul, not much more needs to be said. Some critics would hold it to be the same incident recorded by another hand in some earlier document consulted by the writer of 1 Samuel, containing certain variations such as might take place at the hand of a different historian. But let us observe the differences of the two chapters. (1) The scene is different; in the one case it is near Engedi, in the other in the wilderness, near the hill Hachilah, which

is before Jeshimon. (2) The place where Saul was asleep is different; in the one case a cave; in the other case a camp, protected by a trench. (3) The trophy carried off by David was different; in the one case the skirt of his garment, in the other a spear and cruse of water. (4) The position of David when he made himself known was different; in the one case he went out of the cave and called after Saul; in the other he crossed a gully and spoke from the top of a crag. (5) His way of attracting attention was different; in the one case he spoke directly to Saul, in the other he rallied Abner, captain of the host, for failing to protect the person of the king. But we need not proceed further with this list of differences. Those we have adverted to are enough to repel the assertion that there were not two separate incidents of the same kind. And surely if the author was a mere compiler, using different documents, he might have known if the incidents were the same. If it be said that we cannot believe that two events so similar could have happened, that this is too improbable to be believed, we may answer by referring to similar cases in the Gospels, or even in common life. Suppose a historian of the American civil war to describe what took place at Bull Run. First he gives an account of a battle there between the northern and southern armies, some incidents of which he describes. By-and-bye he again speaks of a battle there, but the incidents he gives are quite different. Our modern critics would say it was all one event, but that the historian, having consulted two accounts, had clumsily written as if there had been two battles. We know that this fancy of criticism is baseless. In the American civil war there were two battles of Bull Run between the same contending

parties at different times. So we may safely believe that there were two instances of David's forbearance to Saul, one in the neighbourhood of Engedi, the other in the neighbourhood of Ziph.

And all that needs to be said further respecting the second act of forbearance by David is that it shines forth all the brighter because it was the second, and because it happened so soon after the other. We may see that David did not put much trust in Saul's profession the first time, for he did not disband his troop, but remained in the wilderness as before. It is quite possible that this displeased Saul. It is also possible that that inveterate false accuser of David from whom he suffered so much would make a great deal of this to Saul, and would represent to him strongly that if David really was the innocent man he claimed to be, after receiving the assurance he got from him he would have sent his followers to their homes, and returned in peace to his own. That he did nothing of the kind may have exasperated Saul, and induced him to change his policy, and again take steps to secure David, as before. Substantially, David's remonstrance with Saul on this second occasion was the same as on the first. But at this time he gave proof of a power of sarcasm which he had not shown before. He rated Abner on the looseness of the watch he kept of his royal master, and adjudged him worthy of death for not making it impossible for any one to come unobserved so near the king, and have him so completely in his power. The apology of Saul was substantially the same as before; but how could it have been different? The acknowledgment of what was to happen to David was hardly so ample as on the last occasion. David doubtless parted from Saul with the old conviction that kindness

was not wanting in his personal feelings, but that the evil influences that were around him, and the fits of disorder to which his mind was subject, might change his spirit in a single hour from that of generous benediction to that of implacable jealousy.

But now to draw to a close. We have adverted to that high reverence for God which was the means of restraining David from lifting up his hand against Saul, because he was the Lord's anointed. Let us now notice more particularly what an admirable spirit of self-restraint and patience David showed in being willing to bear all the risk and pain of a most distressing position, until it should please God to bring to him the hour of deliverance. The grace we specially commend is that of waiting for God's time. Alas! into how many sins, and even crimes, have men been betrayed through unwillingness to wait for God's time! A young man embarks in the pursuits of commerce; but the gains to be derived from ordinary business come in far too slowly for him; he makes haste to be rich, engages in gigantic speculation, plunges into frightful gambling, and in a few years brings ruin on himself and all connected with him. How many sharp and unhandsome transactions continually occur just because men are impatient, and wish to hurry on some consummation which their hearts are set on! Nay, have not murders often taken place just to hasten the removal of some who occupied places that others were eager to fill? And how often are evil things done by those who will not wait for the sanction of honourable marriage?

But even where no act of crime has been committed, impatience of God's time may give rise to many an evil feeling that does not go beyond one's own

breast. Many a son who will succeed to an inheritance on the death of his father, or of some other relative, is tempted to wish, more or less consciously, for an event the last to be desired by a filial heart. You may say, it is human nature; how could any one help it? The example of David shows how one may help it. The heart that is profoundly impressed with the excellence of the Divine will, and the duty and privilege of loyally accepting all His arrangements, can never desire to anticipate that will in any matter, great or small. For how can any good come in the end from forcing forward arrangements out of the Divine order? If, for the moment, this brings any advantage in one direction, it is sure to be followed by far greater evils in another. Do we all realize the full import of our prayer when we say, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"? Of one thing you may be very sure, there is no impatience in heaven for a speedier fulfilment of desirable events than the will of God has ordained. There is no desire to force on the wheels of Providence if they do not seem to be moving fast enough. So let it be with us. Let us fix it as a first principle in our minds, as an immovable rule of our lives, that as God knows best how to order His providence, so any interference with Him is rash and perilous, and wicked too; and with reference both to events which are not lawfully in our hands, and the time at which they are to happen, let us realize it as alike our duty and our interest to say to God, in the spirit of full and unreserved trust—"Not our will, but Thine be done.'

CHAPTER XXXII.

DAVID AND NABAL.

1 Samuel xxv.

WE should be forming far too low an estimate of the character of the people of Israel if we did not believe that they were very profoundly moved by the death of Samuel. Even admitting that but a small proportion of them are likely to have been in warm sympathy with his ardent godliness, he was too remarkable a man, and he had been too conspicuous a figure in the history of the nation, not to be greatly missed, and much spoken of and thought of, when he passed away.

Cast in the same mould with their great leader and legislator Moses, he exerted an influence on the nation only second to that which stood connected with the prophet of the Exodus. He had not been associated with such stirring events in their history as Moses; neither had it been his function to reveal to them the will of God, either so systematically, or so comprehensively, or so supernaturally; but he was marked by the same great spirituality, the same intense reverence for the God of Israel, the same profound belief in the reality of the covenant between Israel and God, and the same conviction of the inseparable connection between a pure worship and flowing prosperity on the

one hand, and idolatrous defection and national calamity on the other.

No man except Moses had ever done more to rivet this truth on the minds and hearts of the people. It was the lifelong aim and effort of Samuel to show that it made the greatest difference to them in every way how they acted toward God, in the way of worship, trust, and obedience. He made incessant war on that cold worldly spirit, so natural to us all that leaves God out of account as a force in our lives, and strives to advance our interests simply by making the most of the conditions of material prosperity.

No doubt with many minds the name of Samuel would be associated with a severity and a spirituality and a want of worldliness that were repulsive to them, as indicating one who carried the matter, to use a common phrase, too far. But at Samuel's death even these men might be visited with a somewhat remorseful conviction that, if Samuel had gone too far, they had not gone half far enough. There might come from the retrospect of his career a wholesome rebuke to their worldliness and neglect of God; for surely, they would feel, if there be a God, we ought to worship Him, and it cannot be well for us to neglect Him altogether.

On the other hand, the career of Samuel would be recalled with intense admiration and gratitude by all the more earnest of the people. What an impressive witness for all that was good and holy had they not had among them! What a living temple, what a Divine epistle, written not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart! What glory and honour had not that man's life been to the nation,—so uniform, so consistent, so high in tone! What a reproof it

carried to low and selfish living, what a splendid example it afforded to old and young of the true way and end of life, and what a blessed impulse it was fitted to give them in the same direction, showing so clearly "what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

By a remarkable connection, though perhaps not by design, two names are brought together in this chapter representing very opposite phases of human character —Samuel and Nabal. In Samuel we have the high-minded servant of God, trained from infancy to smother his own will and pay unbounded regard to the will of his Father in heaven; in Nabal we see the votary of the god of this world, enslaved to his worldly lusts, grumbling and growling when he is compelled to submit to the will of God. Samuel is the picture of the serene and holy believer, enjoying unseen fellowship with God, and finding in that fellowship a blessed balm for the griefs and trials of a wounded spirit; Nabal is the picture of the rich but wretched worldling who cannot even enjoy the bounties of his lot, and is thrown into such a panic by the mere dread of losing them that he actually sinks into the grave. Under the one picture we would place the words of the Apostle in the third chapter of Philippians—"Whose god is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things;" under the other the immediately following words, "Our conversation is in heaven." Such were the two men to whom the summons to appear before God was sent about the same time; the one ripe for glory, the other meet for destruction; the one removed to Abraham's bosom, the other to the pit of woe; each to the master whom he served, and each to the element in which he

had lived. Look on this picture and on that, and say which you would be like. And as you look remember how true it is that as men sow so do they reap. The one sowed to the flesh, and of the flesh he reaped corruption; the other sowed to the Spirit, and of the Spirit he reaped life everlasting. The continuity of men's lives in the world to come gives an awful solemnity to that portion of their lives which they spend on earth :—"He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he that his filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still."

There is another lesson to be gathered from a matter of external order before we proceed to the particulars of the narrative. This chapter, recording David's collision with Nabal, and showing us how David lost his temper, and became hot and impetuous and impatient in consequence of Nabal's treatment, comes in between the narrative of his two great victories over the spirit of revenge and impatience. It gives us a very emphatic lesson—how the servant of God may conquer in a great fight and yet be beaten in a small. The history of all spiritual warfare is full of such cases. In the presence of a great enemy, the utmost vigilance is maintained; every effort is strained, every stimulus is applied. In the presence of a small foe, the spirit of confidence, the sense of security, is liable to leave every avenue unguarded, and to pave the way for signal defeat. When I am confronted with a great trial, I rally all my resources to bear it, I realize the presence of God, I say, "Thou God seest me"; but when it is a little trial, I am apt to meet it unarmed and unguarded, and I experience a humiliating fall. Thus it is that men who have in them the spirit of martyrs, and who

would brave a dungeon or death itself rather than renounce a testimony or falter in a duty, often suffer defeat under the most ordinary temptations of everyday life,—they lose their temper on the most trifling provocations; almost without a figure, they are "crushed before the moth."

Whether the death of Samuel brought such a truce to David as to allow him to join in the great national gathering at his funeral we do not know with certainty; but immediately after we find him in a region called "the wilderness of Paran," in the neighbourhood of the Judean Carmel. It was here that Nabal dwelt. This Carmel is not to be confounded with the famous promontory of that name in the tribe of Asher, where Elijah and the priests of Baal afterwards had their celebrated contest; it was a hill in the tribe of Judah, in the neighbourhood of the place where David had his encampment. A descendant of the lion-hearted Judah and of the courageous Caleb, this Nabal came of a noble stock; but cursed with a narrow heart, a senseless head, and a grovelling nature, he fell as far below average humanity as his great ancestors had risen above it. With all his wealth and family connection, he appears to us now as poor a creature as ever lived, —a sort of "golden beast," as was said of the Emperor Caligula; and we cannot think of him without reflecting how little true glory or greatness mere wealth or worldly position confers,—how infinitely more worthy of honour are the sterling qualities of a generous Christian heart. It is plain that in an equitable point of view Nabal owed much to David; but what he owed could not be enforced by an action at law, and Nabal was one of those poor creatures that acknowledge no other obligation.

The studied courtesy and modesty with which David preferred his claim is interesting; it could not but be against the grain to say anything on the subject; if Nabal had not had his "understanding blinded" he would have spared him this pain; the generous heart is ever thinking of the services that others are rendering, and will never subject modesty to the pain of urging its own. "Ye shall greet him in my name," said David to his messengers; "and thus shall ye say to him that liveth in prosperity, Peace be both to thee, and peace to thy house, and peace be to all that thou hast." No envying of his prosperity—no grudging to him his abundance; but only the Christian wish that he might have God's blessing with it, and that it might all turn to good. It was the time of sheep-shearing, when the flocks were probably counted and the increase over last year ascertained; and by a fine old custom it was commonly the season of liberality and kindness. A time of increase should always be so; it is the time for helping poor relations (a duty often strangely overlooked), for acknowledging ancient kindnesses, for relieving distress, and for devising liberal things for the Church of Christ. David gently reminded Nabal that he had come at this good time; then he hinted at the services which he and his followers had done him; but to show that he did not wish to press hard on him, he merely asked him to give what might come to his hand; though, as the anointed king of Israel, he might have assumed a more commanding title, he asked him to give it to "thy son, David." So modest, gentle, and affectionate an application, savouring so little of the persecuted, distracted outlaw, savouring so much of the mild self-possessed Christian gentleman, —deserved treatment very different from what it

received. The detestable niggardliness of Nabal's heart would not suffer him to part with anything which he could find an excuse for retaining. But greed so excessive, even in its own eyes, must find some cloak to cover it; and one of the most common and most congenial to flinty hearts is—the unworthiness of the applicant. The miser is not content in simply refusing an application for the poor, he must add some abusive charge to conceal his covetousness—they are lazy, improvident, intemperate; or if it be a Christian object he is asked to support,—these unreasonable people are always asking. Any excuse rather than tell the naked truth, "We worship our money; and when we spend it, we spend it on ourselves." Such was Nabal. "Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants now-a-days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take *my* bread, and *my* water, and *my* flesh that I have killed for *my* shearers, and give it unto men, that I know not whence they be?"

As often happens, excessive selfishness overreached itself. Insult added to injury was more than David chose to bear; for once, he lost self-command, and was borne along by impetuous passion. Meek men, when once their temper is roused, usually go to great extremes. And if David's purpose had not been providentially arrested, Nabal and all that belonged to him would have been swept before morning to destruction.

With the quickness and instinctive certainty of a clever woman's judgment, Abigail, Nabal's wife, saw at once how things were going. With more than the calmness and self-possession of many a clever woman, she arranged and despatched the remedy almost instantaneously after the infliction of the wrong. How so

superior a woman could have got yoked to so worthless a man we can scarcely conjecture, unless on the vulgar and too common supposition that the churl's wealth and family had something to do with the match. No doubt she had had her punishment. But luxury had not impaired the energy of her spirit, and wealth had not destroyed the regularity of her habits. Her promptness and her prudence all must admire, her commissariat skill was wonderful in its way; and the exquisite tact and cleverness with which she showed and checked the intended crime of David---all the while seeming to pay him a compliment—could not have been surpassed. "Now therefore, my lord, as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, seeing the Lord *hath withholden thee* from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand, now let thine enemies and they that seek evil to my lord be as Nabal." But the most remarkable of all her qualities is her faith; it reminds us of the faith of Rahab of Jericho, or of the faith of Jonathan; she had the firm persuasion that David was owned of God, that he was to be the king of Israel, and that all the devices men might use against him would fail; and she addressed him—poor outlaw though he was—as one of whose elevation to sovereign power, after what God had spoken, there could not be the shadow of a doubt. Her liberality, too, was very great. And there was a truthful, honest tone about her. Perhaps she spoke even too plainly of her husband, but the occasion admitted of no sort of apology for him; there was no deceit about her, and as little flattery. Her words had a wholesome honest air, and some of her expressions were singularly happy. When she spoke of the soul of my lord as "bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God," she seemed to anticipate

the very language in which the New Testament describes the union of Christ and His people, "Your life is hid with Christ in God." She had a clear conception of the "sure mercies of David," certainly in the literal, and we may hope also in the spiritual sense.

The revengeful purpose and rash vow of David were not the result of deliberate consideration; they were formed under the influence of excitement,—most unlike the solemn and prayerful manner in which the expedition at Keilah had been undertaken. God unacknowledged had left David to misdirected paths. But if we blame David, as we must, for his heedless passion, we must not less admire the readiness with which he listens to the reasonable and pious counsel of Abigail. With the ready instinct of a gracious heart he recognises the hand of God in Abigail's coming,—this mercy had a heavenly origin; and cordially praises Him for His restraining providence and restraining grace. He candidly admits that he had formed a very sinful purpose; but he frankly abandons it, accepts her offering, and sends her away in peace. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to me; and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand." It is a mark of sincere and genuine godliness to be not less thankful for being kept from sinning than from being rescued from suffering.

And it was not long before David had convincing proof that it is best to leave vengeance in the hands of God. "It came to pass, about ten days after, that the Lord smote Nabal that he died." Having abandoned himself at his feast to the beastliest sensuality, his nervous system underwent a depression corresponding

to the excitement that had accompanied the debauch. In this miserable state of collapse and weakness, the news of what had happened gave him a fright from which he never recovered. A few days of misery, and this wretched man went to his own place there to join the great crowd of selfish and godless men who said to God, "Depart from us," and to whom God will but echo their own wish—"Depart from Me!"

When David heard of his death, his satisfaction at the manifest interposition of God on his behalf, and his thankfulness for having been enabled to conquer his impetuosity, overcame for the time every other consideration. Full of this view, he blessed God for Nabal's death, rejoicing over his untimely end more perhaps than was altogether becoming. We, at least, should have liked to see David dropping a tear over the grave of one who had lived without grace and who died without comfort. Perhaps, however, we are unable to sympathize with the earnestness of the feeling produced by God's visible vindication of him; a feeling that would be all the more fervent, because what had happened to Nabal must have been viewed as a type of what was sure to happen to Saul. In the death of Nabal, David by faith saw the destruction of all his enemies—no wonder though his spirit was lifted up at the sight.

If it were not for a single expression, we should, without hesitation, set down the thirty-seventh Psalm as written at this period. The twenty-fifth verse seems to connect it with a later period; even then it seems quite certain that, when David wrote it, the case of Nabal (among other cases perhaps) was full in his view. The great fact in providence on which the psalm turns is the sure and speedy destruction of the

wicked; and the great lesson of the psalm to God's servants is not to fret because of their prosperity, but to rest patiently on the Lord, who will cause the meek to inherit the earth. Many of the minor expressions and remarks, too, are quite in harmony with this occasion: "Trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily *thou shalt be fed*." "Cease from *anger*, and forsake *wrath;* fret not thyself in any wise to do evil." "The *meek* shall inherit the earth." "The mouth of the righteous speaketh *wisdom*,"—unlike Nabal, a fool by name and a fool by nature. The great duty enforced is that of waiting on the Lord; not merely because it is right in itself to do so, but because "He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light and thy judgment as the noonday."

The chapter ends with Abigail's marriage to David. We are told, at the same time, that he had another wife, Ahinoam the Jezreelite, and that Michal, Saul's daughter, had been taken from him, and given to another. These statements cannot but grate upon our ear, indicating a laxity in matrimonial relations very far removed from our modern standard alike of duty and of delicacy. We cannot acquit David of a want of patience and self-restraint in these matters; undoubtedly it is a blot in his character, and it is a blot that led to very serious results. It was an element of coarseness in a nature that in most things was highly refined. David missed the true ideal of family life, the true ideal of love, the true ideal of purity. His polygamy was not indeed imputed to him as a crime; it was tolerated in him, as it had been tolerated in Jacob and in others; but its natural and indeed almost necessary effects were not obviated. In his family it

bred strife, animosity, division; it bred fearful crimes among brothers and sisters; while, in his own case, his unsubdued animalism stained his conscience with the deepest sins, and rent his heart with terrible sorrows. How dangerous is even one vulnerable spot—one unsubdued lust of evil! The fable represented that the heel of Achilles, the only vulnerable part of his body, because his mother held him by it when she dipped him in the Styx, was the spot on which he received his fatal wound. It was through an unmortified lust of the flesh that nearly all David's sorrows came. How emphatic in this view the prayer of the Apostle—"I pray God that your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of the Lord." And how necessary and appropriate the exhortation, "Put on the *whole* armour of God"—girdle, breastplate, sandals, helmet, sword—all; leave no part unprotected, "that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand."

Thus, then, it appears, that for all that was beautiful in David he was not a perfect character, and not without stains that seriously affected the integrity and consistency of his life. In that most important part of a young man's duty—to obtain full command of himself, yield to no unlawful bodily indulgence, and do nothing that, directly or indirectly, can tend to lower the character or impair the delicacy of women,—David, instead of an example, is a beacon. Greatly though his early trials were blessed in most things, they were not blessed in all things. We must not, for this reason, turn from him as some do, with scorn. We are to admire and imitate the qualities that were so fine, especially in early life. Would that many of us were like him in his tenderness, his godliness, and his

attachment to his people! His name is one of the embalmed names of Holy Writ,—all the more that when he did become conscious of his sin, no man ever repented more bitterly; and no man's spirit, when bruised and broken, ever sent more of the fragrance as "of myrrh and aloes and cassia out of the ivory palaces."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DAVID'S SECOND FLIGHT TO GATH.

1 SAMUEL xxvii.; xxviii. 1, 2; xxix.

WE are not prepared for the sad decline in the spirit of trust which is recorded in the beginning of the twenty-seventh chapter. The victory gained by David over the carnal spirit of revenge, shown so signally in his sparing the life of Saul a second time, would have led us to expect that he would never again fall under the influence of carnal fear. But there are strange ebbs and flows in the spiritual life, and sometimes a victory brings its dangers, as well as its glory. Perhaps this very conquest excited in David the spirit of self-confidence; he may have had less sense of his need of daily strength from above; and he may have fallen into the state of mind against which the Apostle warns us, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

In his collision with Nabal we saw him fail in what seemed one of his strong points—the very spirit of self-control which he had exercised so remarkably toward Saul; and now we see him fail in another of his strong points—the spirit of trust toward God. Could anything show more clearly that even the most eminent graces of the saints spring from no native fountain of goodness within them, but depend on the continuance of their vital fellowship with Him of

whom the Psalmist said, "All my springs are in Thee"? (Psalm lxxxvii. 7). Carelessness and prayerlessness interrupt that fellowship; the supply of daily strength ceases to come; temptation arises, and they become weak like other men. "*Abide* in Me," said our Lord, with special emphasis on the need of permanence in the relation; and the prophet says, "They that wait on the Lord," as a habitual exercise, "shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint."

The most strange thing about David's new decline is, that it led him to try a device which he had tried before, and which had proved a great failure. We see him retreating before an enemy he had often conquered; retreating, too, by a path every foot of which he had traversed, and with whose bitter ending he was already familiar. Just as before, his declension begins with distrust; and just as before, dissimulation is the product of the distrustful spirit. He is brought into the most painful dilemma, and into experience of the most grievous disaster; but God, in His infinite mercy, extricates him from the one and enables him to retrieve the other. It is affliction that brings him to his senses and drives him to God; it is the returning spirit of prayer and trust that sustains him in his difficulties, and at last brings to him, from the hand of God, a merciful deliverance from them all.

Our first point of interest is the growth and manifestation of the spirit of distrust. "David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul; there is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines." We find it difficult to account for the sudden triumph of

this very despondent feeling. It is hardly enough to say that David could have had no confidence in Saul's expressions of regret and declared purposes of amendment. That was no new feature of the case. Perhaps one element of the explanation may be, that Saul, with his three thousand men, had not only become familiar with all David's hiding-places, but had stationed troops in various parts of the district that would so hamper his movements as to hem him in as in a prison. Then also there may have been some new outbreak of the malignant fury of Cush the Benjamite, and other enemies who were about Saul, rousing the king to even more earnest efforts than ever to apprehend him. There is yet another circumstance in David's situation, that has not, we think, obtained the notice it deserves, but which may have had a very material influence on his decision. David had now two wives with him, Abigail the widow of Nabal, and Ahinoam the Jezreelitess. He would naturally be desirous to provide them with the comforts of a settled home. A band of young men might put up with the risks and discomforts of a roaming life, which it would not be possible for women to bear. The rougher sex might think nothing of midnight removals, and attacks in the dark, and scampers over wild passes and rugged mountains at all hours of the day and night, and snatches of food at irregular times, and all the other experiences which David and his men had borne patiently and cheerfully in the earlier stages of their outlaw history. But for women this was unsuitable. It is true that this alone would not have led David to say, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul." But it would increase his sense of difficulty; it would make him feel more keenly the embarrassments of his situation; it would help to overwhelm him. And when

he was thus at his wit's end, the sense of danger from Saul would become more and more serious. The tension of a mind thus pressed on every side is something terrible. Pressed and tortured by invincible difficulties, David gives way to despair—"I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul."

Let us observe the manner in which this feeling grew to such strength as to give rise to a new line of conduct. It got entrance into *his heart.* It hovered about him in a somewhat loose form, before he took hold of it, and resolved to act upon it. It approached him in the same manner in which temptation approaches many a one, first presenting itself to the imagination and the feelings, trying to get hold of them, and then getting possession of the will, and turning the whole man in the desired direction. Like a skilful adversary who first attacks an outpost, apparently of little value, but when he has got it erects on it a battery by which he is able to conquer a nearer position, and thus gradually approaches, till at last the very citadel is in his hands,—so sin at first hovers about the outposts of the soul. Often it seems at first just to play with the imagination; one fancies this thing and the other, this sensual indulgence or that act of dishonesty; and then, having become familiar with it there, one admits it to the inner chambers of the soul, and ere long the lust bringeth forth sin. The lesson not to let sin play even with the imagination, but drive it thence the moment one becomes conscious of its presence, cannot be pressed too strongly. Have you ever studied the language of the Lord's Prayer?—"Lead us not *into* temptation." You are being led into temptation whenever you are led to think, with interest and half longing, of any sinful indulgence. Wisdom demands of you

that the moment you are conscious of such a feeling you resolutely exclaim, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" It is the tempter trying to establish a foothold in the outworks, meaning, when he has done so, to advance nearer and nearer to the citadel, till at last you shall find him in strong possession, and your soul entangled in the meshes of perdition.

The conclusion to which David came, under the influence of distrust, as to the best course for him to follow shows what opposite decisions may be arrived at, according to the point of view at which men take their stand. "There is nothing better for me than that I should escape speedily into the land of the Philistines." From a more correct point of view, nothing could have been worse. Had Moses thought of his prospects from the same position, he would have said, "There is nothing better for me than to remain the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and enjoy all the good things to which Providence has so remarkably called me;" but standing on the ground of faith, his conclusion was precisely the opposite. Looking abroad over the world with the eye of sense, the young man may say, "There is nothing better for me than that I should rejoice in my youth, and that my heart should cheer me in the days of my youth, and that I should walk in the ways of mine heart and in the sight of mine eyes." But the eye of faith sees ominous clouds and gathering storms in the distance, which show that there could be nothing worse.

As usual, David's error was connected with the omission of prayer. We find no clause in this chapter, "Bring hither the ephod." He asked no counsel of God; he did not even sit down to deliberate calmly on the matter. The impulse to which he yielded required him to decide at once. The word "speedily"

indicates the presence of panic, the action of a tumultuous force on his mind, inducing him to act as promptly as one does in raising one's arm to ward off a threatened blow. Possibly he had the feeling that, if God's mind were consulted, it would be contrary to his desire, and on that ground, like too many persons, he may have shrunk from honest prayer. How different from the spirit of the psalm—"Show me Thy ways, O Lord, teach me Thy paths; lead me in Thy truth and teach me, for Thou art the God of my salvation; on Thee do I wait all the day." Dost thou imagine, David, that the Lord's arm is shortened that it cannot save, and His ear heavy that it cannot hear? Would not He who delivered you in six troubles cause that in seven no evil should touch thee? Has He not promised that thou shalt be hid from the scourge of the tongue, neither shalt thou be afraid of destruction when it cometh? Dost thou not know that thy seed shall be great and thine offspring as the grass of the earth? Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season.

So "David arose, and he passed over with the six hundred men that were with him, unto Achish the son of Maoch, king of Gath." It is thought by some that this was a different king from the former, the name Achish like the name Pharaoh being used by all the kings. At first the arrangement seemed to succeed. Achish appears to have received him kindly. "David dwelt with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, even David with his two wives." The emphasis laid on the household and the wives shows how difficult it had been to provide for them before. And Saul, at last, gave up the chase, and sought for him no more. Of course, in giving him a

friendly reception, Achish must have had a view to his own interest. He would calculate on making use of him in his battles with Saul, and very probably give an incredulous smile if he heard anything of the scruples he had shown to lift up his hand against the Lord's anointed.

Availing himself of the favourable impression made on Achish, David now begs to have a country town allotted to him as his residence, so as to avoid what appeared the unseemliness of his dwelling in the royal city with him. There was much common sense in the demand, and Achish could not but feel it. Gath was but a little place, and Achish, if he was but lord of Gath, was not a very powerful king. The presence in such a place of a foreign prince, with a retinue of soldiers six hundred strong, was hardly becoming. Possibly Achish's own body guard did not come up in number and in prowess to the troop of David. The request for a separate residence was therefore granted readily, and Ziklag was assigned to David. It lay near the southern border of the Philistines, close to the southern desert. At Ziklag he was away from the eye of the lords of the Philistines that had always viewed him with such jealousy; he was far away from the still greater jealousy of Saul; and with Geshurites, and Gezrites, and Amalekites in his neighbourhood, the natural enemies of his country, he had opportunities of using his troop so as at once to improve their discipline and promote the welfare of his native land.

There was another favourable occurrence in David's experience at this time. From a parallel passage (1 Chron. xii.) we learn that during his residence among the Philistines he was constantly receiving important accessions to his troop. One set of men

who came to him, Benjamites, of the tribe of Saul, were remarkably skilful in the use of the bow and the sling, able to use either right hand or left with equal ease. The men that came to him were not from one tribe only, but from many. A very important section were from Benjamin and Judah. At first David seemed to have some suspicion of their sincerity. Going out to meet them he said to them, "If ye be come peaceably to me to help me, my heart shall be knit unto you; but if ye be come to betray me to my enemies, seeing there is no wrong in my hands, the God of our fathers look thereon and rebuke it." The answer was given by Amasai, in the spirit and rhythmical language of prophecy: "Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse; peace, peace be unto thee, and peace be to thine helpers; for thy God helpeth thee." Thus he was continually receiving evidence of the favour in which he was held by his people, and his band was continually increasing, "until it was a great host, like the host of God." It seemed, up to this point, as if Providence had favoured his removal to the land of the Philistines, and brought to him the security and the prosperity which he could not find in the land of Judah. But it was ill-gained security and only mock-prosperity; the day of his troubles drew on.

The use which, as we have seen, he made of his troop was to invade the Geshurites, the Gezrites, and the Amalekites. In taking this step David had a sinister purpose. It would not have been so agreeable to the Philistines to learn that the arms of David had been turned against these tribes as against his own countrymen. When therefore he was asked by Achish where he had gone that day, he returned an answer fitted, and indeed intended, to deceive. Without saying

in words, "I have been fighting against my own people in the south of Judah," he led Achish to believe that he had, and he was pleased when his words were taken in that sense. Achish, we are told, believed David, believed that he had been in arms against his countrymen. "He hath made his people Israel utterly to abhor him; therefore he shall be my servant for ever." Could there have been a more lamentable spectacle? one of the noblest of men stained by the meanness of a false insinuation; David, the anointed of the God of Israel, ranged with the common herd of liars!

Nor was this the only error into which his crooked policy now led him. To cover his deceitful course he had recourse to an act of terrible carnage. It was deemed by him important that no one should be able to carry to Achish a faithful report of what he had been doing. To prevent this he made a complete massacre, put to death every man, woman, child of the Amalekites and other tribes whom he now attacked. Such massacres were indeed quite common in Eastern warfare. The Bulgarian and other massacres of which we have heard in our own day show that even yet, after an interval of nearly three thousand years, they are not foreign to the practice of Eastern nations. In point of fact, they were not thought more of, or worse of, than any of the other incidents of war. War was held to bind up into one bundle the whole lives and property of the enemy, and give to the conqueror supreme control over it. To destroy the whole was just the same in principle as to destroy a part. If the destruction of the whole was necessary in order to carry out the objects of the campaign, it was not more wicked to perpetrate such destruction than to destroy a part.

True, according to our modern view, there is some-

thing mean in falling on helpless, defenceless women and children, and slaughtering them in cold blood. And yet our modern ideas allow the bombardment or the besieging of great cities, and the bringing of the more slow but terrible process of starvation to bear against women and children and all, in order to compel a surrender. Much though modern civilisation has done to lessen the horrors of war, if we approve of all its methods we cannot afford to hold up our hands in horror at those which were judged allowable in the days of David. Yet surely, you may say, we might have expected better things of David. We might have expected him to break away from the common sentiment, and to show more humanity. But this would not have been reasonable. For it is very seldom that the individual conscience, even in the case of the best men, becomes sensible at once of the vices of its age. How many good men in this country, in the early part of this century, were zealous defenders of slavery, and in America down to a much later time! There is nothing more needful for us in studying history, even Old Testament history, than to remember that very remarkable individual excellence may be found in connection with a great amount of the vices of the age. We cannot attempt to show that David was not guilty of a horrible carnage in his treatment of the Amalekites. All we can say is, he shared in the belief of the time that such carnage was a lawful incident of war. We cannot but feel that in the whole circumstances it left a stain upon his character; and yet he may have engaged in it without any consciousness of barbarity, without any idea that the day would come when his friends would blush for the deed.

The Philistines were now preparing a new campaign

under Achish against Saul and his kingdom, and Achish determined that David should go with him; further, that he should go in the capacity of "keeper of his head," or captain of his body guard, and that this should not be a temporary arrangement, but permanent—"for ever." It is difficult for us to conceive the depth of the embarrassment into which this intimation must have plunged David. We must bear in mind how scrupulous and sensitive his conscience was as to raising his hand against the Lord's anointed; and we must take into account the horror he must have felt at the thought of rushing in deadly array against his own dear countrymen, with most of whom he had had no quarrel, and who had never done him any harm. When Achish made him head of his body guard he paid a great compliment to his fidelity and bravery; but in proportion as the post was honourable it was disagreeable and embarrassing. For David and his men would have to fight close to Achish, under his very eye; and any symptoms of holding back from the fray—any inclination to be off, or to spare the foe, which natural feeling might have dictated in the hour of battle, must be resisted in presence of the king. Perhaps David reckoned that if the Israelites were defeated by the Philistines he might be able to make better terms for them—might even be of use to Saul himself, and thus render such services as would atone for his hostile attitude. But this was a wretched consolation. David was entangled so that he could neither advance nor retreat. Before him was GOD, closing His path in front; behind him was MAN, closing it in rear; and we may well believe he would have willingly given all he possessed if only his feet could have been clear and his conscience upright as before.

Still, he does not appear to have returned to a candid frame of mind, but rather to have continued the dissimulation. He had gone with Achish as far as the battle-field, when it pleased God, in great mercy, to extricate him from his difficulty by using the jealousy of the lords of the Philistines as the means of his dismissal from the active service of King Achish. But instead of gladly retiring when he received intimation that his services were dispensed with, we find him (chap. xxix. 8) remonstrating with Achish, speaking as if it were a disappointment not to be allowed to go with him, and as if he thirsted for an opportunity of chastising his countrymen. It is sad to find him continuing in this strain. We are told that the time during which he abode in the country of the Philistines was a full year and four months. It was to all appearance a time of spiritual declension; and as distrust ruled his heart, so dissimulation ruled his conduct. It could hardly have been other than a time of merely formal prayers and comfortless spiritual experience. If he would but have allowed himself to believe it, he was far happier in the cave of Adullam or the wilderness of Engedi, when the candle of the Lord shone upon his head, than he was afterwards amid the splendour of the palace of Achish, or the princely independence of Ziklag.

The only bright spot in this transaction was the very cordial testimony borne by Achish to the faultless way in which David had uniformly served him. It is seldom indeed that such language as Achish employed can be used of any servant—"I know that thou art good in my sight, as an angel of God." Achish must have been struck with the utter absence of treachery and of all self-seeking in David. David had shown

that singular, unblemished trustworthiness that earned such golden opinions for Joseph in the house of Potiphar and from the keeper of the prison. In this respect he had kept his light shining before men with a clear, unclouded lustre. Even amid his spiritual backsliding and sad distrust of God, he had never stained his hands with greed or theft, he had in all these respects kept himself unspotted of the world.

The chapter of David's history which we have now been pursuing is a very painful one, but the circumstances in which he was placed were extremely difficult and trying. It is impossible to justify the course he took. By-and-bye we shall see how God chastised him for it, and by chastising him brought him to Himself. But to those who are disposed to be very severe on him we might well say, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at him. Who among you have not been induced at times to try carnal and unworthy expedients for extricating yourselves from difficulty? Who, in days of boyhood or girlhood, never told a falsehood to cover a fault? Who of you have been uniformly accustomed to carry to God every difficulty and trial, with the honest, immovable determination to do simply and solely what might seem to be agreeable to God's will? Have we not all cause to mourn over conduct that has dishonoured God and distressed our consciences? May He give all of us light to see wherein we have come short in the past, or wherein we are coming short in the present. And from the bottom of our hearts may we be taught to raise our prayer, From all the craft and cunning of Satan; from all the devices of the carnal mind; from all that blinds us to the pure and perfect will of God—good Lord, deliver us.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SAUL AT ENDOR.

1 Samuel xxviii. 3-25.

FOR a considerable time Saul had been drifting along like a crippled vessel at sea, a melancholy example of a man forsaken of God. But as his decisive encounter with the Philistines drew on, the state of helplessness to which he had been reduced became more apparent than ever. He had sagacity enough to perceive that the expedition which the Philistines were now leading against him was the most formidable that had ever taken place in his day. It was no ordinary battle that was to be fought; it was one that would decide the fate of the country. The magnitude of the expedition on his part is apparent from an expression in the fourth verse—"Saul gathered all Israel together." The place of encounter was not any of the old battle-fields with the Philistines. Usually the engagements had taken place in some of the valleys that ran down from the territories of Dan, or Benjamin, or Judah into the Philistine plain, or on the heights above these. But such places were comparatively contracted, and did not afford scope for great bodies of troops. This time the Philistines chose a wider and more commanding battle-field. Advancing northwards along their own maritime plain, and beyond it along the plain of Sharon, they turned eastwards into the great plain of

Esdraelon or Jezreel, and occupied the northern side of the plain. The troops of Saul were encamped on the southern side, occupying the northern slope of Mount Gilboa. There the two armies faced each other, the wide plain stretching between.

It was a painful moment for Saul when he got his first view of the Philistine host, for the sight of it filled him with consternation. It would appear to have surpassed that of Israel very greatly in numbers, in resources, as it certainly did in its confident spirit. Yet, if Saul had been a man of faith, none of these things would have moved him. Was it not in that very neighbourhood that Barak, with his hasty levies, had inflicted a signal defeat on the Canaanites? And was it not in that very plain that the hosts of Midian lay encamped in the days of Gideon, when the barley cake rolling into their camp overturned and terrified the host, and a complete discomfiture followed? Why should not the Lord work as great a deliverance now? If God was with them, He was more than all that could be against them. Might not this be another of the days foretold by Moses, when one should chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight?

Yes, *if* God was with them. All turned upon that *if*. And Saul felt that God was not with them, and that they could not count on any such deliverance as, in better times, had been vouchsafed to their fathers.

And why, O Saul, when you felt thus, did you not humble yourself before God, confess all your sins, and implore Him to show you mercy? Why did you not cry, "Return, O Lord, how long? And let it repent Thee concerning Thy servants"? Would you have found God inexorable? Would His ear have been heavy that it could not hear? Don't you remember

how Moses said that when Israel, in sore bondage, should cry humbly to God, the Lord would hear his cry, and have mercy on him? Why, O Saul, do you not fall in the dust before Him?

Somehow Saul felt that he could not. Among other effects of sin and rebellion, one of the worst is a stiffening of the soul, making it hard and rigid, so that it cannot bend, it cannot melt, it cannot change its course. The long career of wilfulness that Saul had followed had produced in him this stiffening effect; his spirit was hardened in its own ways, and incapable of all exercise of contrition or humiliation, or anything essentially different from the course he had been following. There are times in the life of a deeply afflicted woman when the best thing she could do would be to weep, but that is just the thing she cannot do. There are times when the best thing an inveterate sinner could do would be to fling himself before God and sob for mercy, but fling himself before God and sob he cannot. Saul was incapable of that exercise of soul which would have saved him and his people. Most terrible effect of cherished sin! It dries up the fountains of contrition and they will not flow. It stiffens the knees and they will not bend. It paralyses the voice and it will not cry. It blinds the eyes and they see not the Saviour. It closes the ears and the voice of mercy is unheard. It drives the distressed one to wells without water, to refuges of lies, to trees twice dead, to physicians who have no medicines, to gods who have no salvation; all he feels is that his case is desperate, and yet somewhere or other he must have help!

Saul did not neglect the outward means by which in other days God had been accustomed to direct the nation. He tried every authorized way he could think

of for getting guidance from above. He believed in a heavenly power, and he asked its guidance and its help. But God took no notice of him. He answered him neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets. Men, though in heart rebellious against God's will, will go through a great deal of mechanical service in the hope of securing His favour. It is not their muscles that get stiffened, but their souls. What a strange conception they must have of God when they fancy that mere external services will please Him! How little Saul knew of God when he supposed that, overlooking all the rebellion of his heart, God would respond to a mechanical effort or efforts to communicate with Him! Don't you know, O Saul, that your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you that He will not hear? Nothing will have the least effect on Him till you own your sin. "I will go and return unto My place, until they acknowledge their offence and seek My face." And this is just what you will not, cannot do! How infinitely precious would one tear of genuine repentance have been in that dark hour! It would have saved thousands of the Israelites from a bloody death; it would have saved the nation from defeat and humiliation; it would have removed the obstacle to fellowship with the Hope of Israel, who would have stood true to His ancient character,—"the Saviour thereof in time of trouble."

But Saul's day of grace was over, and accordingly we find him driven to the most humbling expedient to which a man can stoop—seeking counsel from a quarter against which, in his more prosperous days, he had directed his special energies, as a superstitious, demoralizing agency. He had been most zealous in exterminating

ating a class of persons, abounding in Eastern countries, who pretend to know the secrets of the future, and to have access to the inhabitants of the unseen world. Little could he have dreamt in those days of fiery zeal that a time would come when he would rejoice to learn that one poor wretch had escaped the vigilance of his officers, and still carried on, or pretended to carry on, a nefarious traffic with the realms of the departed! It shows how little man is acquainted with the inner feelings of other men—how little he knows even himself. Doubtless he thought, in the days of exterminating zeal, that it was sheer folly and drivelling superstition that encouraged these sorcerers, and that by clearing them away he would be ridding the land of a mass of rubbish that could be of service to no one. He did not consider that there are times of wretchedness and despair when the soul that knows not God will seek counsel even of men with a familiar spirit—he little dreamt that such would be the case with himself. "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" he would have asked with great indignation in those early days, if it had been insinuated that he would ever be tempted to resort to such counsellors. "What better could I ever be of anything they could tell me? Surely it would be wiser to meet any conceivable danger full in the face than to seek after such counsel as they could give!" He did not consider that when man's spirit is overwhelmed within him, and his craving for help is like the passion of a madman, he will clutch like a drowning man at a straw, he will even resort to a woman with a familiar spirit, if, peradventure, some hint can be got to extricate him from his misery.

But to this complexion it came at last. With dreadful sacrifice of self-respect, Saul had to ask his

advisers to seek out for him a woman of this description. They were able to tell him of such a woman residing at Endor, about ten miles from where they were. With two attendants he set out after nightfall, disguised, and found her. Naturally, she was afraid to do anything in the way of business in the face of such measures as the king had taken against all of her craft, nor would she stir until she had got a solemn promise that she would not be molested in any way. Then, when all was ready, she asked whom she should call up. "Call up Samuel," said Saul. To the great astonishment of the woman herself, she sees Samuel rising up. A shriek from her indicates that she is as much astonished and for the moment frightened as anyone can be. Evidently she did not expect such an apparition. The effect was much too great for the cause. She sees that in this apparition a power is concerned much beyond what she can wield. Instinctively she apprehends that the only man of importance enough to receive such a supernatural visit must be the head of the nation. "Why did you deceive me?" she said, "for thou art Saul." "Never mind that," is virtually Saul's reply; "but tell me what you have seen." The Revised Version gives her answer better than the older one—"I saw a god arise out of the earth." "What is his appearance?" earnestly asks Saul. "He is an old man, and he is covered with a mantle." And Saul sees that it is really Samuel.

But what was it that really happened, and how did it come about? That the woman was able, even if she really had the aid of evil spirits, to bring Samuel into Saul's presence we cannot believe. Nor could she believe it herself. If Samuel really appeared—and the narrative assumes that he did—it must have been by

a direct miracle, God supernaturally clothing his spirit in something like its old form, and bringing him back to earth to speak to Saul. In judgment it seemed good to God to let Saul have his desire, and to give him a real interview with Samuel. "He gave him his request, but sent leanness to his soul." So far from having his fears allayed and his burden removed, Saul was made to see from Samuel's communication that there was nothing but ruin before him; and he must have gone back to the painful duty of the morrow staggering under a load heavier than before.

Samuel begins the conversation; and he does so by reproaching Saul for having disquieted him, and brought him back from his peaceful home above to mingle again in the strife and turmoil of human things. Nothing can exceed the haggard and weird desolation of Saul's answer. "I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me and answereth me no more, neither by prophets nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do." Was ever a king in such a plight? Who would have thought, when Samuel and Saul first came together, and Saul listened so respectfully to the prophet counselling him concerning the kingdom, that their last meeting should be like this? In all Saul's statement there is no word that carries such a load of meaning and of despair as this—"God is departed from me." It is the token of universal confusion and calamity. And Saul felt it, and as no one understood these things like Samuel, he had sought Samuel to counsel his wayward son, to tell him what to do.

It is not every sinner that makes the discovery in this life what awful results follow when God is departed

from him. But if the discovery does not dawn on one in this life, it will come on him with overwhelming force in the life to come. Men little think what they are preparing for themselves when they say to God, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways." The service of God is irksome; the restraints of God's law are distressing; they like a free life, freedom to please themselves. And so they part company with God. The form of Divine service may be kept up or it may not: but God is not their God, and God's will is not their rule. They have left God's ways, they have followed their own. And when conscience has sometimes given them a twinge, when God has reminded them by the silent monitor of His claims, their answer has been, Let us alone, what have we to do with Thee? Depart from us, leave us in peace. Ah! how little have you considered that the most awful thing that could happen to you is just for God to depart from you! If we could conceive the earth a sensitive being, and somehow to get a dislike for the sun, and to pray the sun to depart from her, how awful would be the fulfilment! Losing all the genial influences that brighten her surface, that cover her face with beauty and enrich her soil with abundance, all the foul and slimy creatures of darkness would creep out, all the noxious influences of dissolution and death would riot in their terrible freedom! And is not this but a poor faint picture of man forsaken by God! O sinner, if ever thy wish should be fulfilled, how wilt thou curse the day in which thou didst utter it! When vile lusts rise to uncontrollable authority—when those whom you love turn hopelessly wicked, when you find yourselves joyless, helpless, hopeless, when you try to repent and cannot repent, when you try to pray and

cannot pray, when you try to be pure and cannot be pure—what a terrible calamity you will then feel it that God is departed from you! Trifle not, O man, with thy relation to God; and let not thy history be such that it shall have to be written in the words of the prophet—"But they rebelled and vexed His Holy Spirit; therefore He was turned to be their enemy and He fought against them" (Isaiah lxiii. 10).

There was no comfort for Saul in Samuel's reply, but much the contrary. Why should he have asked advice of the Lord's servant, when he owned that he was forsaken by the Lord Himself? What could the servant do for him if the Master was become his enemy? What can a priest or a minister do for any man if God has turned His face away from him? Can he make God deny Himself, and become favourable to one who has scorned or sinned away His Holy Spirit? Saul was experiencing no more than he had just reason to expect since that fatal day when he had first deliberately set up his own will above God's will in the affair of Amalek. In the course which he began then, he had persistently continued, and God was now just executing the threatenings which Saul had braved. And next day would witness the last of his sad history. The Lord would deliver Israel into the hands of the Philistines; in the collision of the armies he and his sons would be slain; disaster to his arms, death to himself, and destruction to his dynasty would all come together on that miserable day.

It is no wonder that Saul was utterly prostrated: "He fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid, because of the words of Samuel; and there was no strength in him; for he had eaten no bread all the day, nor all the night." He could not have expected

that the interview with Samuel would be a pleasant one, but he never imagined that it would announce such awful calamities. Have you not known sometimes the terrible sensation when you had heard there was something wrong with some of your friends, and on going to inquire, discovered that the calamity was infinitely worse than you had ever dreamt of? A momentary paralysis comes over one; you are stunned and made helpless by the tidings. We may even be tempted to think that surely Samuel was too hard on Saul; might he not have tempered his awful message by some qualifying word of hope and mercy? The answer is, Samuel spoke the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. We are all prone to the thought that when evil men get their doom there will surely be something to modify or mitigate its rigour. Samuel's words to Saul indicate no such relaxation. Moral law will vindicate itself as natural law vindicates itself—"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

The last incident in the chapter is interesting and pleasing. We might have thought that such a calling as that followed by the witch of Endor would have destroyed all the humanities in her nature; that she would have looked on the king's distress with a cold, stoical eye, and that her only concern would be to obtain for herself a fee adapted to the occasion. But she shows much of the woman left in her after all. When she rehearses her service, and the peril of her life at which it has been rendered, to prepare the way for her asking a favour, the favour which she does ask is not for herself at all,—it is on Saul's own behalf, that she might be permitted the honour of preparing for him a meal. Saul's mind is too much occupied and too

much agitated to care for anything of the kind. Still prostrate on the ground he says, "I will not eat." Men overwhelmed by calamity hate to eat, they are too excited to experience hunger. It was only when his servants, thinking how much he had gone through already, how much more he had to go through on the morrow, and how utterly unfit his exhausted body was for the strain—it was then only that he yielded to the request of the woman. And the woman showed that, for all her sinister business, she was equal to the occasion of entertaining a king. The "fat calf in the house" corresponded to the "fatted calf" in the parable of the prodigal son. It was not the custom even in families of the richer class to eat meat at ordinary meals; it was reserved for feasts and extraordinary occasions; and in order to be ready for any emergency a calf was kept close to the house, whose flesh, from the delicate way in which it was reared and fed, was tender enough to be served even at so hasty a meal. With cakes of unleavened bread, this dish could be presented very rapidly, and, unlike the hasty meals which are common among us, was really a more substantial and nourishing entertainment than ordinary. It is touching to mark these traces of womanly feeling in this unhappy being, reminding us of the redeeming features of Rahab the harlot. What effect the whole transaction had on the woman we are not told, and it would be vain to conjecture.

And now Saul retraces his dark and dreary way southward to the heights of Gilboa. We can hardly exaggerate his miserable condition. He had much to think of, and he would have needed a clear, unclouded mind. We can think of him only as miserably distracted, and unable to let his mind settle on anything.

It would have needed his utmost resources to arrange for the battle of to-morrow, a battle in which he knew that defeat was coming, but which he might endeavour, nevertheless, to make as little disastrous as possible. Moreover, he knew it was to be the last day of his life, and troubled thoughts could not but steal in on him as to what should happen when he stood before God. No doubt, too, there were many sad thoughts about his sons, who were to be involved in the same fate as himself. Was there no way of saving any of them? The arrangement of his temporal effects, too, would claim attention, for, restless and excitable as he had been, it was not likely that his private affairs would be in very good order. Anon his thoughts might wander back to his first interview with Samuel, and bitter remorse would send its pang through him as he thought how differently he might have left the kingdom if he had faithfully followed the counsels of the prophet. Possibly amid all these gloomy thoughts one thought of a brighter order might steal into his mind—how thoroughly David, who would come to the throne after him, would retrieve his errors and restore prosperity, and make the kingdom what it had never been under him, a model kingdom, worthy to shadow forth the glories of Messiah's coming reign. Poor distracted man, he was little fitted either to fight a battle with the Philistines or to encounter the last enemy on his own account. What a lesson to be prepared beforehand! On a deathbed, especially a sudden one, distractions can hardly fail to visit us—this thing and the other thing needing to be arranged and thought of. Happy they who at such a moment can say, "I am now ready to depart." "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit, for Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth."

CHAPTER XXXV.

DAVID AT ZIKLAG.

1 SAMUEL xxx.

AFTER David had received from King Achish the appointment of captain of his body guard, he had with his troops accompanied the Philistine army, passing along the maritime plain to the very end of their journey—to the spot selected for battle, close to "the fountain which is in Jezreel." It seems to have been only after the whole Philistine host were ranged in battle array that the presence of David and his men, who remained in the rear to protect the king, arrested the attention of the lords of the Philistines, and on their remonstrance they were sent away. It is probable that David's return to Ziklag, and the expedition in which he had to engage to recover his wives and his property, took place at or about the very time when Saul made his journey to Endor, and when the fatal battle of Gilboa was raging. We have seen that though David never, like Saul, threw off the authority of God, he had been following ways of his own, ways of deceit and unfaithfulness. He too had been exposing himself to the displeasure of God, and on him, as on Saul, some retribution behoved to fall. But in the two cases we see the difference between judgment and chastisement. In the case of Saul it was judgment that came down; his life and his career were terminated avowedly as

the punishment of his offence. In the case of David the rod was lifted to correct, not to destroy; to bring him back, not to drive him for ever away; to fit him for service, not to cut him asunder, or appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There is every reason to believe that the awful disaster that befel David on his return to Ziklag was the means of restoring him to a trustful and truthful frame.

It appears from the chapter now before us that, in the absence of David and his troop, severe reprisals had been taken by the Amalekites for the defeat and utter destruction which they had lately inflicted on a portion of their tribe. We must remember that the Amalekites were a widely dispersed people, consisting of many tribes, each living separately from the rest, but so related that in any emergency they would readily come to one another's help. News of the extermination of the tribes whom David had attacked, and whom he had utterly destroyed lest any of them should bring word to Achish of his real employment, had been brought to their neighbours; and these neighbours determined to take revenge for the slaughter of their kinsmen. The opportunity of David's absence was taken for invading Ziklag, for which purpose a large and well-equipped expedition had been got together; and as they met with no opposition, they carried everything before them. Happily, however, as they found no enemies they did not draw the sword; they counted it better policy to carry off all that could be transported, so as to make use of the goods, and sell the women and children into slavery, and as they had a great multitude of beasts of burden with them (ver. 17) there could be no difficulty in carrying out this plan. It seems very strange that David should have left Ziklag

apparently without the protection of a single soldier; but what seems to us folly had all the effect of consummate wisdom in the end; the passions of the Amalekites were not excited by opposition or by bloodshed; their destructive propensities were satisfied with destroying the town of Ziklag, and every person and thing that could be removed was carried away unhurt. But for days to come David could not know that their expedition had been conducted in this unusually peaceful way; his imagination and his fears would picture far darker scenes.

It must have been an awful moment to David—hardly less so than to Saul when he saw the host of the Philistines near Jezreel—to reach what had been recently so peaceful a home and find it a mass of smoking ruins. If he had been disposed to congratulate himself on the success of the policy which had dictated his escape from the land of Judah, and his settling at Ziklag under protection of King Achish, how in one moment must the rottenness of the whole plan have flashed upon him, and how awed must he have been at the proof now so clearly afforded that the whole arrangement had been frowned on by the God of heaven! What an agony of suspense and distress he must have been in till more definite news could be obtained; and what a burst of despair must have been heard through the camp when it became known to his followers that the worst that could be conceived had happened—that their houses were all destroyed, their property seized, and their wives and children carried off, to be disgraced, or sold, or butchered, as might suit the fancy of their masters! And then, that remorseless massacre that they had lately inflicted on the kinsmen of their invaders, how likely it would be to exasperate

their passions against them! What mercy would they show whose neighbours had received no mercy? What a dreadful fate would these helpless women and children be now experiencing!

It was probably one of the bitterest of the many bitter hours that David ever spent. First there was the natural feeling of disappointment, after a long and weary march, when the comforts of home had been so eagerly looked forward to, and each man seemed already in the embrace of his family, to find home utterly obliterated, and its place marked by blackened ruins. Then there was the far more intense pang to every affectionate heart, caused by the carrying off of the members of their families; this, it appears, was the predominant feeling of the camp: "the soul of the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters." And somehow David was the person blamed, partly perhaps through that hasty but unjust feeling that blames the leader of an expedition for all the mishaps attending it, and partly also, it may be, because Ziklag had been left utterly undefended. "What business had he to march us all at the heels of these uncircumcised Philistines, as if we ought to make common cause with them only to march us back again just as we came, to gain nothing there and to lose everything here!" To all this was added a further element of excitement: it was not merely calamities known and seen that worked in the minds of the people; the gloom of dreaded but uncertain horrors helped to excite them still more. Imagination would quickly supply the place of evidence in picturing the situation of their wives and children. The feelings of the troops were so fearfully excited against David that they spoke of stoning him. The very men that had lately approached him with the beautiful

salutation, "Peace, peace be to thee, and peace be to thine helpers, for thy God helpeth thee," now spoke of stoning him. How like the spirit and the conduct of their descendants a thousand years later, shouting at one time, "Hosanna to the Son of David," and but a few days after, "Crucify Him, crucify Him." The state of David's feelings must have been all the more terrible for the uneasy conscience he had in the matter, for he had too much cause to feel that the dissembling policy which he had been pursuing had caused another massacre, more frightful than that of the priests after his visit to Nob.

It is probable that at this awful moment the mind of David was visited by a blessed influence from above. The wail of woe that spread through his camp, and the dismal ruins that covered the site of his recent home, seem to have spoken to him in that tone of rebuke which the words of the prophet afterwards conveyed, "Thou art the man!" Under great excitement the mind works with great rapidity, and passes almost with the speed of lightning from one mood to another. It is quite possible that under the same electric shock, as we may call it, that brought David to a sense of his sin he was guided back to his former confidence in the mercy and grace of his covenant God. In one instant, we may believe, the miserable hollowness of all those carnal devices in which he had been trusting would flash upon his mind, and God — his own loving Father and covenant God—would appear waiting to be gracious and longing for his return. And now the prodigal son is in his Father's arms, weeping, sobbing, confessing, but at the same time feeling the luxury of forgiveness, rejoicing, trusting and delighting in His protection and blessing.

It may indeed be objected that we are proceeding too much on mere imagination in supposing that David's return to a condition of holy trust in God was effected in this rapid way. The view may be wrong, and we do not insist on it. What we found on is the very short interval between his last act of dissimulation in professing to desire to accompany Achish to battle, and his manifest restoration to the spirit of trust, evinced in the words, applied to him when the people spoke of stoning him, "But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God" (ver. 6). These words show that he has got back to the true track at last, and from that moment prosperity returns. What a blessed thing it was for him that in that hour of utmost need he was able to derive strength from the thought of God,—able to think of the Most High as watching him with interest, and still ready to deliver him!

It was a somewhat similar incident, though not preceded by any such previous backsliding—a similar manifestation of the magical power of trust—that took place in the life of a more modern David, one who in serving God and doing good to man had to encounter a life of wandering, privation, and danger seldom surpassed—the African missionary and explorer, David Livingstone. In the course of his great journey from St. Paul de Loanda on the west coast of Africa to Quilimane on the east, he had to encounter many an angry and greedy tribe, whom he was too poor to be able to pacify by the ordinary method of valuable presents. On one occasion, in the fork at the confluence of the river Loangwa and the river Zambesi, he found one of those hostile tribes. It was necessary for him to have canoes to cross—they would lend him

only one. In other respects they showed an attitude of hostility, and the appearances all pointed to a furious attack the following day. Livingstone was troubled at the prospect,—not that he was afraid to die, but because it seemed as if all his discoveries in Africa would be lost, and his sanguine hopes for planting commerce and Christianity among its benighted and teeming tribes knocked on the head. But he remembered the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, "Go ye therefore into all the world, and preach the gospel unto every creature, and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." On this promise he rested, and steadied his fluttering heart. "It is the word of a gentleman," he said, "the word of one of the most perfect honour. I will not try, as I once thought, to escape by night, but I will wait till to-morrow, and leave before them all. Should such a man as I be afraid? I will take my observations for longitude to-night, though it should be my last. My mind is now quite at rest, thank God." He waited as he had said, and next morning, though the arrangements of the natives still betokened battle, he and his men were allowed to cross the river in successive detachments, without molestation, he himself waiting to the last, and not a hair of their heads being hurt. It was a fine instance of a believing Christian strengthening himself in his God. When faith is genuine, and the habit of exercising it is active, it can remove mountains.

The first result of the restored feeling of trust in David was his giving honour to God's appointed ordinance by asking counsel of Him, through Abiathar the priest, as to the course he should follow. It is the first time we read of him doing so since he left his own country. At first one wonders how he could have

discontinued so precious a means of ascertaining the will of God and the path of duty. But the truth is, when a man is left to himself he cares for no advice or direction but his own inclination. He is not desirous to be led; he wishes only to go comfortably. Indifference to God's guidance explains much neglect of prayer.

David has now made his application, and he has got a clear and decided answer. He can feel now that he is treading on solid ground. How much happier he must have been than when driving hither and thither, scheming and dissembling, and floundering from one device of carnal wisdom to another! As for his people, he can think of them now with far more tranquillity; have they not been all along in God's keeping, and is it not true that He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps?

We need not dwell at great length on the incidents that immediately followed. No events could have fallen out more favourably. One-third of his troops was indeed so exhausted that they had to be left at the brook Besor. With the other four hundred he set out in search of the foe. The special providence of God, so clearly and frequently displayed on this occasion, provided a guide for David in the person of an Egyptian slave, who, having fallen sick, had been abandoned by his master, and had been three days and nights without meat or drink. Careful treatment having resuscitated this young man, and a solemn assurance having been given him that he would neither be killed nor given back to his master (the latter alternative seems to have been as terrible as the other), he conducts them without loss of time to the camp of the Amalekites. Each day's journey brought them nearer

and nearer to the great wilderness where, some five or six hundred years before, their fathers had encountered Amalek at Rephidim, and had gained a great victory over them, after not a few fluctuations, through the uplifted arms of Moses, the token of reliance on the strength of God. Through the same good hand on David, the Amalekites, surprised in the midst of a time of careless and uproarious festivity, were completely routed, and all but destroyed. Every article they had stolen, and every woman and child they had carried off, were recovered unhurt. Such a deliverance was beyond expectation. When the Lord turned again the captivity of Ziklag, they were like men that dream.

The happy change of circumstances was signalized by David by two memorable acts, the one an act of justice, the other an act of generosity. The act of justice was his interfering to repress the selfishness of the part of his troops who were engaged in the fight with Amalek, some of whom wished to exclude the disabled portion, who had to remain at the brook Besor, from sharing the spoil. The objectors are called "the wicked men and the men of Belial." It is a significant circumstance that David had been unable to inspire all his followers with his own spirit—that even at the end of his residence in Ziklag there were wicked men and men of Belial among them. No doubt these were the very men that had been loudest in their complaints against David, and had spoken of stoning him when they came to know of the calamity at Ziklag. Complaining men are generally selfish men. They objected to David's proposal to share the spoil with the whole body of his followers. Their proposal was especially displeasing to David at a time when God had given them such tokens of undeserved goodness. It was of

the same sort as the act of the unforgiving servant in the parable, who, though forgiven his ten thousand talents, came down with unmitigated ferocity on the fellow-servant that owed him an hundred pence.

The act of generosity was his distribution over the cities in the neighbourhood of the spoil which he had taken from the Amalekites. If he had been of a selfish nature he might have kept it all for himself and his people. But it was "the spoil of the enemies of the Lord." It was David's desire to recognise God in connection with this spoil, both to show that he had not made his onslaught on the Amalekites for personal ends, and to acknowledge, in royal style, the goodness which God had shown him. That it was an act of policy as well as a recognition of God may be readily acknowledged. Undoubtedly David was desirous to gain the favourable regard of his neighbours, as a help toward his recognition when the throne of Israel should become empty. But we may surely admit this, and yet recognise in his actions on this occasion the generosity as well as the godliness of his nature. He was one of those men to whom it is more blessed to give than to receive, and who are never so happy themselves as when they are making others happy. The Bethel mentioned in ver. 27 as first among the places benefited can hardly be the place ordinarily known by that name, which was far distant from Ziklag, but some other Bethel much nearer the southern border of the land. The most northerly of the places specified of whose situation we are assured was Hebron, itself well to the south of Judah, and soon to become the capital where David reigned. The large number of places that shared his bounty was a proof of the royal liberality with which it was spread abroad.

And in this bounty, this royal profusion of gifts, we may surely recognise a fit type of "great David's greater Son." How clearly it appeared from the very first that the spirit of Jesus Christ exemplified His own maxim which we have just quoted, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Once only, and that in His infancy, when the wise men laid at His feet their myrrh, frankincense, and gold, do we read of anything like a lavish contribution of the gifts of earth being given to Him. But follow Him through the whole course of His earthly life and ministry, and see how just was the image of Malachi that compared Him to the sun—"the Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings." What a gloriously diffusive nature He had, dropping gifts of fabulous price in every direction without money and without price! "Jesus went about in all Galilee" (it was now the turn of the north to enjoy the benefit), "teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of diseases and all manner of sickness among the people." Listen to the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount; what a dropping of honey as from the honeycomb we have in those beatitudes, which so wonderfully commend the precious virtues to which they are attached! Follow Jesus through any part of His earthly career, and you find the same spirit of royal liberality. Stand by Him even in the last hour of His mortal life, and count His deeds of kindness. See how He heals the ear of Malchus, though He healed no wounds of His own. Listen to Him deprecating the tears of the weeping women, and turning their attention to evils among themselves that had more need to be wept for. Hear the tender tones of His prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Observe the gracious

look He casts on the thief beside Him in answer to his prayer—"Verily I say unto thee, this day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." Mark how affectionately He provides for His mother. See Him after His resurrection saying to the weeping Mary, Woman, why weepest thou? Count that multitude of fishes which He has brought to the nets of His disciples, in token of the riches of spiritual success with which they are to be blessed. And mark, on the day of Pentecost, how richly from His throne in glory He sheds down the Holy Spirit, and quickens thousands together with the breath of spiritual life. "Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive, Thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them."

It is a most blessed and salutary thing for you all to cherish the thought of the royal munificence of Christ. Think of the kindest and most lavish giver you ever knew, and think how Christ surpasses him in this very grace as far as the heavens are above the earth. What encouragement does this give you to trust in Him! What a sin it shows you to commit when you turn away from Him! But remember, too, that Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God. Remember that He came to reveal the Father. Perhaps we are more disposed to doubt the royal munificence of the Father than that of the Son. But how unreasonable is this! Was not Jesus Christ Himself, with all the glorious fulness contained in him, the gift of God—His unspeakable gift? And in every act of generosity done by Christ have we not just an exhibition of the Father's heart? Sometimes we think hardly of God's generosity in connection with His decree of election. Leave that alone; it is one of the deep things of God; remember

that every soul brought to Christ is the fruit of God's unmerited love and infinite grace; and remember too what a vast company the redeemed are, when in the Apocalyptic vision, an early section of them—those that came out of "the great tribulation"—formed a great multitude that no man could number. Sometimes we think that God is not generous when He takes away very precious comforts, and even the most cherished treasures of our hearts and our homes. But that is love in disguise; "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." And sometimes we think that He is not generous when He is slow to answer our prayers. But He designs only to encourage us to perseverance, and to increase and finally all the more reward our faith. Yes, truly, whatever anomalies Providence may present, and they are many; whatever seeming contradictions we may encounter to the doctrine of the exceeding riches of the grace of God, let us ascribe all that to our imperfect vision and our imperfect understanding. Let us correct all such narrow impressions at the cross of Christ. Let us reason, like the Apostle: "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" And let us feel assured that when at last God's ways and dealings even with this wayward world are made plain, the one conclusion which they will go to establish for evermore is—that GOD IS LOVE.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE DEATH OF SAUL.

1 Samuel xxxi.

THE plain of Esdraelon, where the battle between Saul and the Philistines was fought, has been celebrated for many a deadly encounter, from the very earliest period of history. Monuments of Egypt lately deciphered make it very plain that long before the country was possessed by the Israelites the plain had experienced the shock of contending armies. The records of the reign of Thotmes III., who has sometimes been called the Alexander the Great of Egypt, bear testimony to a decisive fight in his time near Megiddo, and enumerate the names of many towns in the neighbourhood, most of which occur in Bible history, of which the spoil was carried to Egypt and placed in the temples of the Egyptian gods. Here, too, it was afterwards that Barak encountered the Canaanites, and Gideon the Midianites and Amalekites; here "Jehu smote all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men, and his familiar friends, and his priests, until he left none remaining;" here Josiah was slain in his great battle with the Egyptians; here was the great lamentation after Josiah's death, celebrated by Zechariah, "the mourning of Hadad-Rimmon in the valley of Megiddo;" in short, in the words of Dr. Clarke, "Esdraelon

has been the chosen place of encampment in every great contest carried on in the country, until the disastrous march of Napoleon Bonaparte from Egypt into Syria. Jews, Gentiles, Saracens, Crusaders, Egyptians, Persians, Druses, Turks, Arabs, and French, warriors out of every nation which is under heaven, have pitched their tents upon the plains of Esdraelon, and have beheld their banners wet with the dews of Tabor and Hermon." So late as 1840, when the Pacha of Egypt had seized upon Syria, he was compelled to abandon the country when the citadel of Acre, which guards the entrance of the plain of Esdraelon by sea, was bombarded and destroyed by the British fleet. It is no wonder that in the symbolical visions of the Apocalypse, a town in this plain, Ar-Mageddon, is selected as the battle-field for the great conflict when the kings of the whole earth are to be gathered together unto the battle of the great day of Almighty God. As in the plains of Belgium, the plains of Lombardy, or the carse of Stirling, battle after battle has been fought in the space between Jezreel and Gilboa, to decide who should be master of the whole adjacent territory.

The Philistine host are said to have gathered themselves together and pitched in Shunem (chap. xxviii. 4), and afterwards to have gathered all their hosts to Aphek, and pitched by the fountain which is in Jezreel (xxix. 1). That is to say, they advanced from a westward to a northward position, which last they occupied before the battle. Saul appears from the beginning to have arranged his troops on the northern slopes of Mount Gilboa, and to have remained in that position during the battle. It was an excellent position for fighting, but very unfavourable for a retreat. Apparently the Philistines began the battle by moving south-

wards across the plain till they reached the foot of Gilboa, where the tug of war began. Notwithstanding the favourable position of the Hebrews, they were completely defeated. The archers appear to have done deadly execution; as they advanced nearer to the host of Israel, the latter would move backward to get out of range; while the Philistines, gaining confidence, would press them more and more, till the orderly retreat became a terrible rout. So utterly routed was the Israelite army that they do not appear to have tried a single rally, which, as they had to retreat over Mount Gilboa, it would have been so natural for them to do. Panic and consternation seem to have seized them very early in the battle; that they would be defeated was probably a foregone conclusion, but the attitude of a retreating army seems to have been assumed more quickly and suddenly than could have been supposed. If the Philistine army, seeing the early confusion of the Israelites, had the courage to pour themselves along the valleys on each side of Gilboa, no way of retreat would be left to their enemy except over the top of the hill. And when that was reached, and the Israelites began to descend, the arrows of the pursuing Philistines would fall on them with more deadly effect than ever, and the slaughter would be tremendous.

Saul seems never to have been deficient in personal courage, and in the course of the battle he and his staff were evidently in the very thickest of the fight. "The Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Melchi-shua, the sons of Saul." Saul himself was greatly distressed in his flight by reason of the archers. Finding himself wounded, and being provided with neither chariot nor other means of escape, a horror

seized him that if once the enemy got possession of him alive they would subject him to some nameless mutilation or horrible humiliation too terrible to be thought of. Hence his request to his armour-bearer to fall on him. When the armour-bearer refused, he took a sword from him and killed himself.

It may readily be allowed that to one not ruled habitually by regard to the will of God this was the wisest course to follow. If the Philistine treatment of captive kings resembled the Assyrian, death was far rather to be chosen than life. When we find on Assyrian monuments such frightful pictures as those of kings obliged to carry the heads of their sons in processions, or themselves pinned to the ground by stakes driven through their hands and feet, and undergoing the horrible process of being flayed alive, we need not wonder at Saul shrinking with horror from what he might have had to suffer if he had been taken prisoner.

But what are we to think of the moral aspect of his act of suicide? That in all ordinary cases suicide is a daring sin, who can deny? God has not given to man the disposal of his life in such a sense. It is a daring thing for man to close his day of grace sooner than God would have closed it. It is a reckless thing to rush into the presence of his Maker before His Maker has called him to appear. It is a presumptuous thing to calculate on bettering his condition by plunging into an untried eternity. No doubt one must be tender in judging of men pressed hard by real or imaginary terrors, perhaps their reason staggering, their instincts trembling, and a horror of great darkness obscuring everything. Yet how often, in his last written words, does the suicide bear testimony against himself when he hopes that God will forgive him, and beseeches his friends to

forgive him. Does not this show that in his secret soul he is conscious that he ought to have borne longer, ought to have quitted himself more like a man, and suffered every extremity of fortune before quenching the flame of life within him?

The truth is, that the suicide of Saul, as of many another, is an act that cannot be judged by itself, but must be taken in connection with the course of his previous life. We have said that to one not habitually ruled by regard to the will of God, self-destruction at such a moment was the wisest course. That is to say, if he merely balanced what *appeared* to be involved in terminating his life against what was involved in the Philistines taking him and torturing him, the former alternative was by far the more tolerable. But the question comes up,—if he had not habitually disregarded the will of God, would he ever have been in that predicament? The criminality of many an act must be thrown back on a previous act, out of which it has arisen. A drunkard in a midnight debauch quarrels with his father, and plunges a knife into his heart. When he comes to himself he is absolutely unconscious of what he has done. He tells you he had no wish nor desire to injure his father. It was not his proper self that did it, but his proper self over-mastered, overthrown, brutalized by the monster drink. Do you excuse him on this account? Far from it. You excuse him of a deliberate design against his father's life. But you say the possibility of that deed was involved in his getting drunk. For a man to get drunk, to deprive himself for the time of his senses, and expose himself to an influence that may cause him to commit a most horrible and unnatural crime, is a fearful sin. Thus you carry back the criminality of the murder to the

previous act of getting drunk. So in regard to the suicide of Saul. The criminality of that act is to be carried back to the sin of which he was guilty when he determined to follow his own will instead of the will of God. It was through that sin that he was brought into his present position. Had he been dutiful to God he would never have been in such a dilemma. On the one hand he never would have been so defeated and humiliated in battle; and on the other hand he would have had a trust in the Divine protection even when a bloody enemy like the Philistines was about to seize him. It was the true source alike of his public defeat and of his private despair that he indicated when he said to Samuel, "God is departed from me;" and he might have been sure that God would not have departed from him if he had not first departed from God.

It is a most important principle of life we thus get sight of, when we see the bearing that one act of sin has upon another. It is very seldom indeed that the consequences of any sin terminate with itself. Sin has a marvellous power of begetting, of leading you on to other acts that you did not think of at first, of involving you in meshes that were then quite out of your view. And this multiplying process of sin is a course that may begin very early. Children are warned of it in the hymn—"He that does one fault at first, and lies to hide it, makes it two." A sin needs to be covered, and another sin is resorted to in order to provide the covering. Nor is that all. You have a partner in your sin, and to free yourself you perhaps betray your partner. That partner may be not only the weaker vessel, but also by far the heavier sufferer, and yet, in your wretched selfishness, you deny all share of the sin, or you leave your partner to be ruined. Alas!

alas! how terrible are the ways of sin. How difficult it often is for the sinner to retrace his steps! And how terrible is the state of mind when one says, I must commit this sin or that—I have no alternative! How terrible was Saul's position when he said, "I must destroy myself." Truly sin is a hard, unfeeling master—"The way of transgressors is hard." He only that walketh uprightly walketh surely. "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, that walk in the law of the Lord."

The terrible nature of the defeat which the Israelites suffered on this day from the Philistines is apparent from what is said in the seventh verse—"And when the men of Israel that were on the other side of the valley, and they that were beyond Jordan, saw that the men of Israel fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook their cities and fled; and the Philistines came and dwelt in them." The plain of Esdraelon is interrupted, and in a sense divided into two, by three hills—Tabor, Gilboa, and Little Hermon. On the eastern side of these hills the plain is continued on to the Jordan valley. The effect of the battle of Gilboa was that all the rich settlements in that part of the plain had to be forsaken by the Israelites and given up to the Philistines. More than that, the Jordan valley ceased to afford the protection which up to this time it had supplied against enemies from the west. For the most part, the trans-Jordanic tribes were exposed to quite a different set of enemies. It was the Syrians from the north, the Moabites and the Ammonites from the east, and the Midianites and Amalekites from the remoter deserts, that were usually the foes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh. But on this occasion a new foe assailed them. The Philistines

actually crossed the Jordan, and the rich pastures of Gilead and Bashan, with the flocks and herds that swarmed upon them, became the prey of the uncircumcised. Thus the terror of the Philistines, hitherto confined to the western portion of the country, was spread, with all its attendant horrors, over the length and breadth of Israel. We get a vivid view of the state of the country when David was called to take charge of it. And we get a vivid view of the worse than embarrassment, the fatal crime, into which David would have been led if he had remained in the Philistine camp and taken any part in this campaign.

How utterly crushed the Philistines considered the Israelites to be, and how incapable of striking any blow in their own defence, is apparent from the humiliating treatment of the bodies of Saul and his sons, the details of which are given in this chapter and in the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles (chap. x.). If there had been any possibility of the Israelites being stung into a new effort by the dishonour done to their king and princes, that dishonour would not have been so terribly insulting. But there was no such possibility. The treatment was doubly insulting. Saul's head, severed from his body, was put in the temple of Dagon (1 Chron. x.); his armour was hung up in the house of Ashtaroth; and his body was fastened to the wall of Beth-shan. The same treatment seems to have been bestowed on his three sons. The other part of the insult arose from the idolatrous spirit in which all this was done. The tidings of the victory were ordered to be carried to the house of their idols as well as to their people (1 Sam. xxxi. 9). The trophies were displayed in the temples of these idols. The spirit of

vaunting, which had so roused David against Goliath because he defied the armies of the living God, appeared far more offensively than ever. Not only was Israel defeated, but in the view of the Philistines Israel's God as well Dagon and Ashtaroth had triumphed over Jehovah. The humiliation suffered in the days when the ark of God brought such calamities to them and their gods was now amply avenged. The image of Dagon was not found lying on its face, all shattered save the stump, after the heads of Saul and his sons had been placed in his temple. Yes, and the nobles at least of the Philistines would boast that the slaughter of Goliath by David, and the placing of his head and his armour near Jerusalem—probably in the holy place of Israel—were amply avenged. Well was it for David, we may say again, that he had no share in this terrible battle! Henceforth undoubtedly there would be no more truce on his part towards the Philistines. Had they not dishonoured the person of his king? had they not insulted the dead body of Jonathan his noble friend? had they not hurled new defiance against the God of Israel? had they not spread robbery and devastation over the whole length and breadth of the country, and turned every happy family into a group of cowering slaves? Were this people to be any longer honoured with his friendship? "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united!"

The only redeeming incident, in all this painful narrative, is the spirited enterprise of the men of Jabesh-gilead, coming to Beth-shan by night, removing the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall, and burying them with all honour at Jabesh. Beth-shan was a considerable distance from Gilboa, where Saul

and his sons appear to have fallen; but probably it was the largest city in the neighbourhood, and therefore the best adapted to put the remains of the king and the princes to open shame. Jabesh-gilead was somewhere on the other side of the Jordan, distant from Beth-shan several miles. It was highly creditable to its people that, after a long interval, the remembrance of Saul's first exploit, when he relieved them from the cruel threats of the Ammonites, was still strong enough to impel them to the gallant deed which secured honourable burial for the bodies of Saul and his sons. We are conscious of a reverential feeling rising in our hearts toward this people as we think of their kindness to the dead, as if the whole human race were one family, and a kindness done nearly three thousand years ago were in some sense a kindness to ourselves.

That first exploit of Saul's, rescuing the men of Jabesh-gilead, seems never to have been surpassed by any other enterprise of his reign. As we now look back on the career of Saul, which occupies so large a portion of this book, we do not find much to interest or refresh us. He belonged to the order of military kings. He was not one of those who were devoted to the intellectual, or the social, or the religious elevation of his kingdom. His one idea of a king was to rid his country of its enemies. "He fought," we are told, "against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, and against the children of Ammon, and against Edom, and against the king of Zobah, and against the Philistines: and whithersoever he turned himself he vexed them. And he did valiantly and smote Amalek, and delivered Israel out of the hands of them that spoiled them." That success gave him a good name as king, but it did not draw much affection to him; and it had more

effect in ridding the people of evil than in conferring on them positive good. Royalty bred in Saul what it bred in most kings of the East, an imperious temper, a despotic will. Even in his own family he played the despot. And if he played the despot at home he did so not less in public. All that we can say in his favour is, that he did not carry his despotism so far as many. But his jealous and in so far despotic temper could not but have had an evil effect on his people. We cannot suppose that when jealousy was so deep in his nature David was the only one of his officers who experienced it. The secession of so many very able men to David, about the time when he was with the Philistines, looked as if Saul could not but be jealous of any man who rose to high military eminence. That Saul was capable of friendly impulses is very different from saying that his heart was warm and winning. The most vital want in him was the want of godliness. He had little faith in the nation as God's nation, God's heritage. He had little love for prophets, or for men of faith, or for any who attached great importance to moral and spiritual considerations. His persecution of David and his murder of the priests are deep stains than can never be erased. And that godless nature of his became worse as he went on. It is striking that the last transaction in his reign was a decided failure in the the very department in which he had usually excelled. He who had gained what eminence he had as a military king, utterly failed, and involved his people in utter humiliation, in that very department. His abilities failed him because God had forsaken him. The Philistines whom he had so often defeated crushed him in the end. To him the last act of life was very different

from that of Samson—Samson conquering in his death Saul defeated and disgraced in his.

Need we again urge the lesson? "Them that honour Me I will honour; but they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed." You dare not leave God out in your estimate of the forces that bear upon your life. You dare not give to Him a secondary place. God must have the first place in your regards. Are you really honouring Him above all, prizing His favour, obeying His will, trusting in His word? Are you even trying, amid many mortifying failures, to do so? It is not the worst life that numbers many a failure, many a confession, many a prayer for mercy and for grace to help in time of need, provided always your heart is habitually directed to God as the great end of existence, the Pole Star by which your steps are habitually to be directed, the Sovereign whose holy will must be your great rule, the Pattern whose likeness should be stamped on your hearts, the God and Father of your Lord Jesus Christ, whose love, and favour, and blessing are evermore the best and brightest inheritance for all the children of men.

END OF VOL. I.

THE SECOND BOOK

OF

SAMUEL.

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CHAPTER I.

DAVID'S LAMENT FOR SAUL AND JONATHAN.

2 SAMUEL i.

DAVID had returned to Ziklag from the slaughter of the Amalekites only two days before he heard of the death of Saul. He had returned weary enough, we may believe, in body, though refreshed in spirit by the recovery of all that had been taken away, and by the possession of a vast store of booty besides. But in the midst of his success, it was discouraging to see nothing but ruin and confusion where the homes of himself and his people had recently been ; and it must have needed no small effort even to plan, and much more to execute, the reconstruction of the city. But besides this, a still heavier feeling must have oppressed him. What had been the issue of that great battle at Mount Gilboa ? Which army had conquered ? If the Israelites were defeated, what would be the fate of Saul and Jonathan ? Would they be prisoners now in the hands of the Philistines ? And if so, what would be his duty in regard to them ? And what course would it be best for him to take for the welfare of his ruined and distracted country ?

He was not kept long in suspense. An Amalekite from the camp of Israel, accustomed, like the Bedouin generally, to long and rapid runs, arrived at Ziklag,

bearing on his body all the tokens of a disaster, and did obeisance to David, as now the legitimate occupant of the throne. David must have surmised at a glance how matters stood. His questions to the Amalekite elicited an account of the death of Saul materially different from that given in a former part of the history, "As I happened by chance upon Mount Gilboa, behold Saul leaned upon his spear; and lo, the chariots and the horsemen followed hard after him. And when he looked behind him, he saw me and called unto me. And I answered, Here am I. And he said unto me, Who art thou? And I answered him, I am an Amalekite. And he said unto me, Stand, I pray thee, beside me, and slay me, for anguish hath taken hold of me: because my life is yet whole in me. So I stood beside him and slew him, because I was sure that he could not live after that he was fallen; and I took the crown that was upon his head, and the bracelet that was upon his arm, and have brought them hither to my lord." There is no reason to suppose that this narrative of Saul's death, in so far as it differs from the previous one, is correct. That this Amalekite was somehow near the place where Saul fell, and that he witnessed all that took place at his death, there is no cause to doubt. That when he saw that both Saul and his armour-bearer were dead he removed the crown and the bracelet from the person of the fallen king, and stowed them away among his own accoutrements, may likewise be accepted without any difficulty. Then, managing to escape, and considering what he would do with the ensigns of royalty, he decided to carry them to David. To David he accordingly brought them, and no doubt it was to ingratiate himself the more with him, and to establish the stronger claim

to a splendid recompense, that he invented the story of Saul asking him to kill him, and of his complying with the king's order, and thus putting an end to a life which already was obviously doomed.

In his belief that his pretended despatching of the king would gratify David, the Amalekite undoubtedly reckoned without his host; but such things were so common, so universal in the East, that we can hardly divest ourselves of a certain amount of compassion for him. Probably there was no other kingdom, round and round, where this Amalekite would not have found that he had done a wise thing in so far as his own interests were concerned. For helping to despatch a rival, and to open the way to a throne, he would probably have received cordial thanks and ample gifts from one and all of the neighbouring potentates. To David, the matter appeared in a quite different light. He had none of that eagerness to occupy the throne on which the Amalekite reckoned as a universal instinct of human nature. And he had a view of the sanctity of Saul's life which the Amalekite could not understand. His being the Lord's anointed ought to have withheld this man from hurting a hair of his head. Sadly though Saul had fallen back, the divinity that doth hedge a king still encompassed him. "Touch not mine anointed" was still God's word concerning him. This miserable Amalekite, a member of a doomed race, appeared to David by his own confession not only a murderer, but a murderer of the deepest dye. He had destroyed the life of one who in an eminent sense was "the Lord's anointed." He had done what once and again David had himself shrunk from doing. It is no wonder that David was at once horrified and provoked, —horrified at the unblushing criminality of the man;

provoked at his effrontery, at his doing without the slightest compunction what, at an immense sacrifice, he had twice restrained himself from doing. No doubt he was irritated, too, at the bare supposition on which the Amalekite reckoned so securely, that such a black deed could be gratifying to David himself. So without a moment's hesitation, and without allowing the astonished youth a moment's preparation, he caused an attendant to fall upon him and kill him. His sentence was short and clear, "Thy blood be upon thy head; for thy mouth hath testified against thee saying, I have slain the Lord's anointed."

In this incident we find David in a position in which good men are often placed, who profess to have regard to higher principles than the men of the world in regulating their lives, and especially in the estimate which they form of their worldly interests and considerations. That such men are sincere in the estimate they thus profess to follow is what the world is very slow to believe. Faith in any moral virtue that rises higher than the ordinary worldly level is extremely rare among men. The world fancies that every man has his price—sometimes that every woman has her price. Virtue of the heroic quality that will face death itself rather than do wrong is what it is most unwilling to believe in. Was it not this that gave rise to the memorable trial of Job? Did not the great enemy, representing here the spirit of the world, scorn the notion that at bottom Job was in any way better than his neighbours, although the wonderful prosperity with which he had been gifted made him appear more ready to pay honour to God? It is all a matter of selfishness, was Satan's plea; take away his prosperity, and lay a painful malady on his body, his religion will vanish, he

will curse Thee to Thy face. He would not give Job credit for anything like disinterested virtue—anything like genuine reverence for God. And was it not on the same principle the tempter acted when he brought his threefold temptation to our Lord in the wilderness? He did not believe in the superhuman virtue of Jesus; he did not believe in His unswerving loyalty to truth and duty. He did not believe that He was proof at once against the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. At least he did not believe till he tried, and had to retreat defeated. When the end of His life drew near Jesus could say, "The prince of this world cometh, but hath nothing in Me." There was no weakness in Jesus to which he could fasten his cord—no trace of that worldliness by which he had so often been able to entangle and secure his victims.

So likewise Simon the sorcerer fancied that he only needed to offer money to the Apostles to secure from them the gift of the Holy Ghost. "Thy money perish with thee!" was the indignant rebuke of Peter. It is the same refusal to believe in the reality of high principle that has made so many a persecutor fancy that he could bend the obstinacy of the heretic by the terrors of suffering and torture. And on the other hand, no nobler sight has ever been presented than when this incredulous scorn of the world has been rebuked by the firmness and triumphant faith of the noble martyr. What could Nebuchadnezzar have thought when the three Hebrew children were willing to enter the fiery furnace? What did Darius think of Daniel when he shrank not from the lions' den? How many a rebuke and surprise was furnished to the rulers of this world in the early persecutions of the Christians,

and to the champions of the Church of Rome in the splendid defiance hurled against them by the Protestant martyrs! The men who formed the Free Church of Scotland were utterly discredited when they affirmed that rather than surrender the liberties of their Church they would part with every temporal privilege which they had enjoyed from connection with the State. Such is the spirit of the world; if it will not rise to the apparent level of the saints, it delights to pull down the saints to its own. These pretences to superior virtue are hypocrisy and pharisaism; test their professions by their worldly interests, and you will find them soon enough on a level with yourselves.

The Amalekite that thought to gratify David by pretending that he had slain his rival had no idea that he was wronging him; in his blind innocency he seems to have assumed as a matter of course that David would be pleased. It is not likely the Amalekite had ever heard of David's noble magnanimity in twice sparing Saul's life when he had an excellent pretext for taking it, if his conscience had allowed him. He just assumed that David would feel as he would have felt himself. He simply judged of him by his own standard. His object was to show how great a service he had rendered him, and thus establish a claim to a great reward. Never did heartless selfishness more completely overreach itself. Instead of a reward, this impious murderer had earned a fearful punishment. An Israelite might have had a chance of mercy, but an Amalekite had none—the man was condemned to instant death. One can hardly fancy his bewilderment,—what a strange man was this David! What a marvellous reverence he had for God! To place him on a throne was no favor, if it involved doing anything against "the Lord's anointed!" And

yet who shall say that in his estimate of this proceeding David did more than recognize the obligation of the first commandment? To him God's will was all in all.

Dismissing this painful episode, we now turn to contemplate David's conduct after the intelligence reached him that Saul was dead. David was now just thirty (2 Sam. v. 4); and never did man at that age, or at any age, act a finer part. The death, and especially the sudden death, of a relative or a friend has usually a remarkable effect on the tender heart, and especially in the case of the young. It blots out all remembrance of little injuries done by the departed; it fills one with regret for any unkind words one may have spoken, or any unkind deeds one may ever have done to him. It makes one very forgiving. But it must have been a far more generous heart than the common that could so soon rid itself of every shred of bitter feeling toward Saul—that could blot out, in one great act of forgiveness, the remembrance of many long years of injustice, oppression, and toil, and leave no feelings but those of kindness, admiration, and regret, called forth by the contemplation of what was favourable in Saul's character. How beautiful does the spirit of forgiveness appear in such a light! Yet how hard do many feel it to be to exercise this spirit in any case, far less in all cases! How terrible a snare the unforgiving spirit is liable to be to us, and how terrible an obstacle to peaceful communion with God! "For if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

The feelings of David toward Saul and Jonathan were permanently embodied in a song which he composed for the occasion. It seems to have been called "The Song of the Bow," so that the rendering of the Revised

Version—"he taught them the Song of the Bow," gives a much better sense than the old—"he taught them the use of the bow." The song was first written in the book of Jasher; and it was ordered by David to be taught to the people as a permanent memorial of their king and his eldest son. The writing of such a song, the spirit of admiration and eulogy which pervades it, and the unusual enactment that it should be taught to the people, show how far superior David was to the ordinary feelings of jealousy, how full his heart was of true generosity. There was, indeed, a political end which it might advance; it might conciliate the supporters of Saul, and smooth David's way to the throne. But there is in it such depth and fulness of feeling that one can think of it only as a genuine cardiphonia —a true voice of the heart. The song dwells on all that could be commended in Saul, and makes no allusion to his faults. His courage and energy in war, his happy co-operation with Jonathan, his advancement of the kingdom in elegance and comfort, are all duly celebrated. David appears to have had a real affection for Saul, if only it had been allowed to bloom and flourish. His martial energy had probably awakened his admiration before he knew him personally; and when he became his minstrel, his distressed countenance would excite his pity, while his occasional gleams of generous feeling would thrill his heart with sympathy. The terrible effort of Saul to crush David was now at an end, and like a lily released from a heavy stone, the old attachment bloomed out speedily and sweetly. There would be more true love in families and in the world, more of expansive, responsive affection, if it were not so often stunted by reserve on the one hand, and crushed by persecution on the other.

The song embalms very tenderly the love of Jonathan for David. Years had probably elapsed since the two friends met, but time had not impaired the affection and admiration of David. And now that Jonathan's light was extinguished, a sense of desolation fell on David's heart, and the very throne that invited his occupation seemed dark and dull under the shadow cast on it by the death of Jonathan. As a prize of earthly ambition it would be poor indeed; and if ever it had seemed to David a proud distinction to look forward to, such a feeling would appear very detestable when the same act that opened it up to him had deprived him for ever of his dearest friend, his sweetest source of earthly joy. The only way in which it was possible for David to enjoy his new position was by losing sight of himself; by identifying himself more closely than ever with the people; by regarding the throne as only a position for more self-denying labours for the good of others. And in the song there is evidence of the great strength and activity of this feeling. The sentiment of patriotism burns with a noble ardour; the national disgrace is most keenly felt; the thought of personal gain from the death of Saul and Jonathan is entirely swallowed up by grief for the public loss. "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph!" In David's view, it is no ordinary calamity that has fallen on Israel. It is no common men that have fallen, but "the beauty of Israel," her ornament and her glory, men that were never known to flinch or to flee from battle, men that were "swifter than eagles, and stronger than lions." It is not in any obscure corner that they have fallen, but "on her high places," on Mount Gilboa,

at the head of a most conspicuous and momentous enterprise. Such a national loss was unprecedented in the history of Israel, and it seems to have affected David and the nation generally as the slaughter at Flodden affected the Scots, when it seemed as if all that was great and beautiful in the nation perished—"the flowers o' the forest were a' weed awa'."

A word on the general structure of this song. It is not a song that can be classed with the Psalms. Nor can it be said that in any marked degree it resembles the tone or spirit of the Psalms. Yet this need not surprise us, nor need it throw any doubt either as to the authorship of the song or the authorship of the Psalms. The Psalms, we must remember, were avowedly composed and designed for use in the worship of God. If the Greek term *psalmoi* denotes their character, they were songs designed for use in public worship, to be accompanied with the lyre, or harp, or other musical instruments suitable for them. The special sphere of such songs was—the relation of the human soul to God. These songs might be of various kinds—historical, lyrical, dramatical; but in all cases the paramount subject was, the dealings of God with man, or the dealings of man with God. It was in this class of composition that David excelled, and became the organ of the Holy Ghost for the highest instruction and edification of the Church in all ages. But it does not by any means follow that the poetical compositions of David were restricted to this one class of subject. His muse may sometimes have taken a different course. His poems were not always directly religious. In the case of this song, whose original place in the book of Jasher indicated its special character, there is no mention of the relation of Saul and Jonathan to God.

The theme is, their services to the nation, and the national loss involved in their death. The soul of the poet is profoundly thrilled by their death, occurring in such circumstances of national disaster. No form of words could have conveyed more vividly the idea of unprecedented loss, or thrilled the nation with such a sense of calamity. There is not a line of the song but is full of life, and hardly one that is not full of beauty. What could more touchingly indicate the fatal nature of the calamity than that plaintive entreaty—"Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon"? How could the hills be more impressively summoned to show their sympathy than in that invocation of everlasting sterility—"Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain upon you, or fields of offerings"? What gentler veil could be drawn over the horrors of their bloody death and mutilated bodies than in the tender words, "Saul and Jonathan were loving and pleasant in their lives, and in their deaths they were not divided"? And what more fitting theme for tears could have been furnished to the daughters of Israel, considering what was probably the prevalent taste, than that Saul had "clothed them with scarlet and other delights, and put on ornaments of gold upon their apparel"? Up to this point Saul and Jonathan are joined together; but the poet cannot close without a special lamentation for himself over him whom he loved as his own soul. And in one line he touches the very kernel of his own loss, as he touches the very core of Jonathan's heart—"thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." Such is the Song of the Bow. It hardly seems suitable to attempt to draw spiritual lessons out of a song, which, on purpose, was placed in a different category. Surely it is enough to

point out the exceeding beauty and generosity of spirit which sought in this way to embalm the memory and perpetuate the virtues of Saul and Jonathan; which blended together in such melodious words a deadly enemy and a beloved friend; which transfigured one of the lives so that it shone with the lustre and the beauty of the other; which sought to bury every painful association, and gave full and unlimited scope to the charity that thinketh no evil. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*, was a heathen maxim,—"Say nothing but what is good of the dead." Surely no finer exemplification of the maxim was ever given than in this "Song of the Bow."

To "thoughts that breathe and words that burn," like those of this song, David could not have given expression without having his whole soul stirred with the desire to repair the national disaster, and by God's help bring back prosperity and honour to Israel. Thus, both by the afflictions that saddened his heart and the stroke of prosperity that raised him to the throne, he was impelled to that course of action which is the best safeguard under God against the hurtful influences both of adversity and prosperity. Affliction might have driven him into his shell, to think only of his own comfort; prosperity might have swollen him with a sense of his importance, and tempted him to expect universal admiration;—both would have made him unfit to rule; by the grace of God he was preserved from both. He was induced to gird himself for a course of high exertion for the good of his country; the spirit of trust in God, after its long discipline, had a new field opened for its exercise; and the self-government acquired in the wilderness was to prove its usefulness in a higher sphere. Thus the providence of his heavenly

Father was gradually unfolding His purposes concerning him; the clouds were clearing off his horizon; and the "all things" that once seemed to be "against him" were now plainly "working together for his good."

CHAPTER II.

BEGINNING OF DAVID'S REIGN AT HEBRON.

2 SAMUEL ii. 1-7.

THE death of Saul did not end David's troubles. nor was it for a good many years that he became free to employ his whole energies for the good of the kingdom. It appears that his chastisement for his unbelieving spirit, and for the alliance with Achish to which it led, was not yet completed. The more remote consequences of that step were only beginning to emerge, and years elapsed before its evil influence ceased altogether to be felt. For in allying himself with Achish, and accompanying his army to the plain of Esdraelon, David had gone as near to the position of a traitor to his country as he could have gone without actually fighting against it. That he should have acted as he did is one of the greatest mysteries of his life; and the reason why it has not attracted more notice is simply because the worst consequences of it were averted by his dismissal from the Philistine army through the jealousy and suspicion of their lords. But for that step David must have been guilty of gross treachery either in one direction or another; either to his own countrymen, by fighting against them in the Philistine army; or to King Achish, by suddenly turning against him in the heat of the battle, and creating a diversion

which might have given a new chance to his countrymen. In either case the proceeding would have been most reprehensible.

But to his own countrymen he would have made himself especially obnoxious if he had lent himself to Achish in the battle. Whether he contemplated treachery to Achish is a secret that seems never to have gone beyond his own bosom. All the appearances favoured the supposition that he would fight against his country, and we cannot wonder if, for a long time, this made him an object of distrust and suspicion. If we would understand how the men of Israel must have looked on him, we have only to fancy how we should have viewed a British soldier if, with a troop of his countrymen, he had followed Napoleon to the field of Waterloo, and had been sent away from the French army only through the suspicion of Napoleon's generals. In David's case, all his former achievements against the Philistines, all that injustice from Saul which had driven him in despair to Achish, his services against the Amalekites, his generous use of the spoil, as well as his high personal character, did not suffice to counteract the bad impression of his having followed Achish to battle. For after a great disaster the public mind is exasperated; it is eager to find a scapegoat on whom to throw the blame, and it is unmeasured in its denunciations of any one who can be plausibly assailed. Beyond all doubt, angry and perplexed as the nation was, David would come in for a large share of the blame; his alliance with Achish would be denounced with unmeasured bitterness; and, probably enough, he would have to bear the brunt of many a bitter calumny in addition, as if he had instigated Achish, and given him information which had helped him to conquer.

His own tribe, the tribe of Judah, was far the friendliest, and the most likely to make allowance for the position in which he had been placed. They were his own flesh and blood; they knew the fierce and cruel malignity with which Saul had hunted him down, and they knew that, as far as appearances went, his chances of getting the better of Saul's efforts were extremely small, and the temptation to throw himself into the hands of Achish correspondingly great. Evidently, therefore, the most expedient course he could now take was to establish himself in some of the cities of Judah. But in that frame of recovered loyalty to God in which he now was, he declined to take this step, indispensable though it seemed, until he had got Divine direction regarding it. "It came to pass, after this, that David inquired of the Lord saying, Shall I go up to any of the cities of Judah? And the Lord said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And He said, Unto Hebron." The form in which he made the inquiry shows that to his mind it was very clear that he ought to go up to one or another of the cities of Judah; his advisers and companions had probably the same conviction; but notwithstanding, it was right and fitting that no such step should be taken without his asking direction from God. And let us observe that, on this occasion, prayer was not the last resort of one whom all other refuge had failed, but the first resort of one who regarded the Divine approval as the most essential element for determining the propriety of the undertaking.

It is interesting and instructive to ponder this fact. The first thing done by David, after virtually acquiring a royal position, was to ask counsel of God. His

royal administration was begun by prayer. And there was a singular appropriateness in this act. For the great characteristic of David, brought out especially in his Psalms, is the reality and the nearness of his fellowship with God. We may find other men who equalled him in every other feature of character—who were as full of human sympathy, as reverential, as self-denying, as earnest in their efforts to please God and to benefit men; but we shall find no one who lived so closely under God's shadow, whose heart and life were so influenced by regard to God, to whom God was so much of a personal Friend, so blended, we may say, with his very existence. David therefore is eminently himself when asking counsel of the Lord. And would not all do well to follow him in this? True, he had supernatural methods of doing this, and you have only natural; he had the Urim and Thummim, you have only the voice of prayer; but this makes no real difference, for it was only in great national matters that he made use of the supernatural method; in all that concerned his personal relations to God it was the other that he employed. And so may you. But the great matter is to resemble David in his profound sense of the infinite value and reality of Divine direction. Without this your prayers will always be more or less matters of formality. And being formal, you will not feel that you get any good of them. Is it really a profound conviction of yours that in every step of your life God's direction is of supreme value? That you dare not even change your residence with safety without being directed by Him? That you dare not enter on new relations in life,—new business, new connections, new recreations—without seeking the Divine countenance? That endless difficulties, troubles,

complications, are liable to arise, when you simply follow your own notions or inclinations without consulting the Lord? And under the influence of that conviction do you try to follow the rule, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him"? And do you endeavour to get from prayer a trustful rest in God, an assurance that He will not forsake you, a calm confidence that He will keep His word? Then, indeed, you are treading in David's footsteps, and you may expect to share his privilege—Divine direction in your times of need.

The city of Hebron, situated about eighteen miles to the south of Jerusalem, was the place to which David was directed to go. It was a place abounding in venerable and elevating associations. It was among the first, if not the very first, of the haunts of civilised men in the land—so ancient that it is said to have been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt (Numb. xiii. 22). The father of the faithful had often pitched his tent under its spreading oaks, and among its olive groves and vine-clad hills the gentle Isaac had meditated at eventide. There Abraham had watched the last breath of his beloved Sarah, the partner of his faith and the faithful companion of his wanderings; and there from the sons of Heth he had purchased the sepulchre of Machpelah, where first Sarah's body, then his own, then that of Isaac were laid to rest. There Joseph and his brethren had brought up the body of Jacob, in fulfilment of his dying command, laying it beside the bones of Leah. It had been a halting-place of the twelve spies when they went up to search the land; and the cluster of grapes which they carried back was cut from the neighbouring valley, where the finest grapes of the country are found to this day. The

sight of its venerable cave had doubtless served to raise the faith and courage of Joshua and Caleb, when the other spies became so feeble and so faithless. In the division of the land it had been assigned to Caleb, one of the best and noblest spirits the nation ever produced; afterwards it was made one of the Levitical cities of refuge. More recently, it had been one of the places selected by David to receive a portion of the Amalekite spoil. No place could have recalled more vividly the lessons of departed worth and the victories of early faith, or abounded more in tokens of the blessedness of fully following the Lord. It was a token of God's kindness to David that He directed him to make this city his headquarters. It was equivalent to a new promise that the God of Abraham and of Isaac and Jacob would be the God of David, and that his public career would prepare the way for the mercies in the prospect of which they rejoiced, and sustain the hope to which they looked forward, though they did not in their time see the promise realised.

It was a further token of God's goodness that no sooner had David gone up to Hebron than "the men of Judah came and anointed him king over the house of Judah." Judah was the imperial or premier tribe, and though this was not all that God had promised to David, it was a large instalment. The occasion might well awaken mingled emotions in his breast—gratitude for mercies given and solicitude for the responsibility of a royal position. With his strong sense of duty, his love of righteousness and hatred of wickedness, we should expect to find him strengthening himself in the purpose to rule only in the fear of God. It is just such views and purposes as these we find expressed in the hundred and first Psalm, which internal

evidence would lead us to assign to this period of his life:—

"I will sing of mercy and of judgment:
Unto Thee, O Lord, will I sing.
I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way.
O when wilt Thou come unto me?
I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.
I will set no base thing before mine eyes:
I hate the work of them that turn aside;
It shall not cleave to me.
A froward heart shall depart from me:
I will know no evil thing.
Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I destroy;
Him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer.
Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land that they may dwell with me:
He that walketh in a perfect way, he shall minister unto me.
He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house;
He that speaketh falsehood shall not be established before mine eyes.
Morning by morning will I destroy all the wicked of the land;
To cut off all the workers of iniquity from the city of the Lord."*

By a singular coincidence, the first place to which the attention of David was called, after his taking possession of the royal position, was the same as that to which Saul had been directed in the same circumstances—namely, Jabesh-gilead. It was far away from Hebron, on the other side of Jordan, and quite out

* From the use of the expression "city of the Lord," it has been inferred by some critics that this Psalm must have been written after the capture and consecration of Jerusalem. But there is no reason why Hebron might not have been called at that time "the city of the Lord." The Lord had specially designated it as the abode of David; and that alone entitled it to be so called. Those who have regarded this Psalm as a picture of a model household or family have never weighed the force of the last line, which marks the position of a king, not a father. The Psalm is a true statement of the principles usually followed by David in public rule, but not in domestic administration.

of the scope of David's former activities; but he recognised a duty to its people, and he hastened to perform it. In the first place, he sent them a gracious and grateful message of thanks for the kindness shown to Saul, the mark of respect they had paid him in burying his body. Every action of David's in reference to his great rival evinces the superiority of his spirit to that which was wont to prevail in similar circumstances. Within the Scriptures themselves we have instances of the dishonour that was often put on the body of a conquered rival. The body of Jehoram, cast ignominiously by Jehu, in mockery of his royal state, into the vineyard of Naboth, which his father Ahaz had unrighteously seized, and the body of Jezebel, flung out of the window, trodden under foot, and devoured by dogs are instances readily remembered. The shocking fate of the dead body of Hector, dragged thrice round the walls of Troy after Achilles' chariot, was regarded as only such a calamity as might be looked for amid the changing fortunes of war. Mark Antony is said to have broken out into laughter at the sight of the hands and head of Cicero, which he had caused to be severed from his body. The respect of David for the person of Saul was evidently a sincere and genuine feeling; and it was a sincere pleasure to him to find that this feeling had been shared by the Jabeshites, and manifested in their rescuing Saul's body and consigning it to honourable burial.

In the next place, he invokes on these people a glowing benediction from the Lord: "The Lord show kindness and truth to you;" and he expresses his purpose also to requite their kindness himself. "Kindness and truth." There is something instructive in the combination of these two words. It is the Hebrew way of

expressing "true kindness," but even in that form, the words suggest that kindness is not always true kindness, and mere kindness cannot be a real blessing unless it rest on a solid basis. There is in many men an amiable spirit which takes pleasure in gratifying the feelings of others. Some manifest it to children by loading them with toys and sweetmeats, or taking them to amusements which they know they like. But it does not follow that such kindness is always true kindness. To please one is not always the kindest thing you can do for one, for sometimes it is a far kinder thing to withhold what will please. True kindness must be tested by its ultimate effects. The kindness that loves best to improve our hearts, to elevate our tastes, to straighten our habits, to give a higher tone to our lives, to place us on a pedestal from which we may look down on conquered spiritual foes, and on the possession of what is best and highest in human attainment,—the kindness that bears on the future, and especially the eternal future, is surely far more true than that which, by gratifying our present feelings, perhaps confirms us in many a hurtful lust. David's prayer for the men of Jabesh was an enlightened benediction: "God show you kindness and truth." And so far as he may have opportunity, he promises that he will show them the same kindness too.

We need not surely dwell on the lesson which this suggests. Are you kindly disposed to any one? You wish sincerely to promote his happiness, and you try to do so. But see well to it that your kindness is true. See that the day shall never come when that which you meant so kindly will turn out to have been a snare, and perhaps a curse. Think of your friend as an immortal being, with either heaven or hell before him,

and consider what genuine kindness requires of you in such a case. And in every instance beware of the kindness which shakes the stability of his principles, which increases the force of his temptations, and makes the narrow way more distasteful and difficult to him than ever.

There can be no doubt that David was moved by considerations of policy as well as by more disinterested motives in sending this message and offering this prayer for the men of Jabesh-gilead. Indeed, in the close of his message he invites them to declare for him, and follow the example of the men of Judah, who have made him king. The kindly proceeding of David was calculated to have a wider influence than over the men of Jabesh, and to have a conciliating effect on all the friends of the former king. It would have been natural enough for them to fear, considering the ordinary ways of conquerors and the ordinary fate of the friends of the conquered, that David would adopt very rigid steps against the friends of his persecutors. By this message sent across the whole country and across the Jordan, he showed that he was animated by the very opposite spirit: that, instead of wishing to punish those who had served with Saul, he was quite disposed to show them favour. Divine grace, acting on his kindly nature, made him forgiving to Saul and all his comrades, and presented to the world the spectacle of an eminent religious profession in harmony with a noble generosity.

But the spirit in which David acted towards the friends of Saul did not receive the fitting return. The men of Jabesh-gilead appear to have made no response to his appeal. His peaceable purpose was defeated through Abner, Saul's cousin and captain-general of his army, who set up Ishbosheth, one of Saul's sons, as

king in opposition to David. Ishbosheth himself was but a tool in Abner's hands, evidently a man of no spirit or activity; and in setting him up as a claimant for the kingdom, Abner very probably had an eye to the interests of himself and his family. It is plain that he acted in this matter in that spirit of ungodliness and wilfulness of which his royal cousin had given so many proofs; he knew that God had given the kingdom to David, and afterwards taunted Ishbosheth with the fact (iii. 9); perhaps he looked for the reversion of the throne if Ishbosheth should die, for it needed more than an ordinary motive to go right in opposition to the known decree of God. The world's annals contain too many instances of wars springing from no higher motive than the ambition of some Diotrephes to have the pre-eminence. You cry shame on such a spirit; but while you do so take heed lest you share it yourselves. To many a soldier war is welcome because it is the pathway to promotion, to many a civilian because it gives for the moment an impulse to the business with which he is connected. How subtle and dangerous is the feeling that secretly welcomes what may spread numberless woes through a community if only it is likely to bring some advantage to ourselves! O God, drive selfishness from the throne of our hearts, and write on them in deepest letters Thine own holy law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

The place chosen for the residence of Ishbosheth was Mahanaim, in the half-tribe of Manasseh, on the east side of the Jordan. It is a proof how much the Philistines must have dominated the central part of the country that no city in the tribe of Benjamin and no place even on the western side of the Jordan could be obtained as a royal seat for the son of Saul. Surely

this was an evil omen. Ishbosheth's reign, if reign it might be called, lasted but two short years. No single event took place to give it lustre. No city was taken from the Philistines, no garrison put to flight, as at Michmash. No deed was ever done by him or done by his adherents of which they might be proud, and to which they might point in justification of their resistance to David. Ishbosheth was not the wicked man in great power, spreading himself like the green bay-tree, but a short-lived, shrivelled plant, that never rose above the humiliating circumstances of its origin. Men who have defied the purpose of the Almighty have often grown and prospered, like the little horn of the Apocalypse; but in this case of Ishbosheth little more than one breath of the Almighty sufficed to wither him up. Yes, indeed, whatever may be the immediate fortunes of those who unfurl their own banner against the clear purpose of the Almighty, there is but one fate for them all in the end—utter humiliation and defeat. Well may the Psalm counsel all, "Kiss ye the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, if once His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."

CHAPTER III.

BEGINNING OF CIVIL WAR.

2 Samuel ii. 12—32

THE well-meant and earnest efforts of David to ward off strife and bring the people together in recognising him as king were frustrated, as we have seen, through the efforts of Abner. Unmoved by the solemn testimony of God, uttered again and again through Samuel, that He had rejected Saul and found as king a man after His own heart; unmoved by the sad proceedings at Endor, where, under such awful circumstances, the same announcement of the purpose of the Almighty had been repeated; unmoved by the doom of Saul and his three sons on Mount Gilboa, where such a striking proof of the reality of God's judgment on his house had been given; unmoved by the miserable state of the kingdom, overrun and humiliated by the Philistines and in the worst possible condition to bear the strain of a civil war,—this Abner insisted on setting up Ishbosheth and endeavouring to make good his claims by the sword. It was never seen more clearly how "one sinner destroyeth much good."

As to the immediate occasion of the war, David was quite innocent, and Abner alone was responsible; but to a feeling and patriotic heart like David's, the war itself must have been the occasion of bitter distress

Did it ever occur to him to think that in a sense he was now brought, against his will, into the position which he had professed to King Achish to be willing to occupy, or that, placed as he now was in an attitude of opposition to a large section of his countrymen, he was undergoing a chastisement for what he was rash enough to say and to do then?

In the commencement of the war, the first step was taken by Abner. He went out from Mahanaim, descended the Jordan valley, and came to Gibeon, in the tribe of Benjamin, a place but a few miles distant from Gibeah, where Saul had reigned. His immediate object probably was to gain such an advantage over David in that quarter as would enable him to establish Ishbosheth at Gibeah, and thus bring to him all the prestige due to the son and successor of Saul. We must not forget that the Philistines had still great influence in the land, and very likely they were in possession of Gibeah, after having rifled Saul's palace and appropriated all his private property. With this powerful enemy to be dealt with ultimately, it was the interest of Abner to avoid a collision of the whole forces on either side, and spare the slaughter which such a contest would have involved. There is some obscurity in the narrative now before us, both at this point and at other places. But it would appear that, when the two armies were ranged on opposite sides of the "pool" or reservoir at Gibeon, Abner made the proposal to Joab that the contest should be decided by a limited number of young men on either side, whose encounter would form a sort of play or spectacle, that their brethren might look on, and, in a sense, enjoy. In the circumstances, it was a wise and humane proposal, although we get something of a shock from the frivolous

spirit that could speak of such a deadly encounter as "play."

David was not present with his troops on this occasion, the management of them being entrusted to Joab, his sister's son. Here was another of the difficulties of David—a difficulty which embarrassed him for forty years. He was led to commit the management of his army to his warlike nephew, although he appears to have been a man very unlike himself. Joab is much more of the type of Saul than of David. He is rough, impetuous, worldly, manifesting no faith, no prayerfulness, no habit or spirit of communion with God. Yet from the beginning he threw in his lot with David; he remained faithful to him in the insurrection of Absalom; and sometimes he gave him advice which was more worthy to be followed than his own devices. But though Joab was a difficulty to David, he did not master him. The course of David's life and the character of his reign were determined mainly by those spiritual feelings with which Joab appears to have had no sympathy. It was unfortunate that the first stage of the war should have been in the hands of Joab; he conducted it in a way that must have been painful to David; he stained it with a crime that gave him bitter pain.

The practice of deciding public contests by a small and equal number of champions on either side, if not a common one in ancient times, was, at any rate, not very rare. Roman history furnishes some memorable instances of it: that of Romulus and Aruns, and that of the Horatii and the Curiatii; while the challenge of Goliath and the proposal to settle the strife between the Philistines and the Hebrews according to the result of the duel with him had taken place not many years

before. The young men were accordingly chosen, twelve on either side; but they rushed against each other with such impetuosity that the whole of them fell together, and the contest remained undecided as before. Excited probably by what they had witnessed, the main forces on either side now rushed against each other; and when the shock of battle came, the victory fell to the side of David, and Abner and his troops were signally defeated. On David's side, there was not a very serious loss, the number of the slain amounting to twenty; but on the side of Abner the loss was three hundred and sixty. To account for so great an inequality we must remember that in Eastern warfare it was in the pursuit that by far the greatest amount of slaughter took place. That obstinate maintenance of their ground which is characteristic of modern armies seems to have been unknown in those times. The superiority of one of the hosts over the other appears usually to have made itself felt at the beginning of the engagement; the opposite force, seized with panic, fled in confusion, followed close by the conquerors, whose weapons, directed against the backs of the fugitive, were neither caught on shields, nor met by counter-volleys. Thus it was that Joab's loss was little more than the twelve who had fallen at first, while that of Abner was many times more.

Among those who had to save themselves by flight after the battle was Abner, the captain of the host. Hard in pursuit of him, and of him only, hastened Asahel, the brother of Joab. It is not easy to understand all the circumstances of this pursuit. We cannot but believe that Asahel was bent on killing Abner, but probably his hope was that he would get near enough to him to discharge an arrow at him, and that in doing

so he would incur no personal danger. But Abner appears to have remarked him, and to have stopped his flight and faced round to meet him. Abner seems to have carried sword and spear; Asahel had probably nothing heavier than a bow. It was fair enough in Abner to propose that if they were to be opponents, Asahel should borrow armour, that they might fight on equal terms. But this was not Asahel's thought. He seems to have been determined to follow Abner, and take his opportunity for attacking him in his own way. This Abner would not permit; and, as Asahel would not desist from his pursuit, Abner, rushing at him, struck him with such violence with the hinder end of his spear that the weapon came out behind him. "And Asahel fell down there, and died in the same place; and it came to pass that as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died stood still." Asahel was a man of consequence, being brother of the commander of the army and nephew of the king. The death of such a man counted for much, and went far to restore the balance of loss between the two contending armies. It seems to have struck a horror into the hearts of his fellow-soldiers; it was an awful incident of the war. It was strange enough to see one who an hour ago was so young, so fresh and full of life, stretched on the ground a helpless lump of clay; but it was more appalling to remember his relation to the two greatest men of the nation—David and Joab. Certainly war is most indiscriminate in the selection of its victims; commanders and their brothers, kings and their nephews, being as open to its catastrophes as any one else. Surely it must have sent a thrill through Abner to see among the first victims of the strife which he had kindled one whose family stood so high, and whose

death would exasperate against him so important a person as his brother Joab.

The pursuit of the defeated army was by-and-bye interrupted by nightfall. In the course of the evening the fugitives somewhat rallied, and concentrated on the top of a hill, in the wilderness of Gibeon. And here the two chiefs held parley together. The proceedings were begun by Abner, and begun by a question that was almost insolent. "Abner called to Joab and said, Shall the sword devour for ever? knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end? how long shall it be ere thou bid the people return from following their brethren?" It was an audacious attempt to throw on Joab and Joab's master the responsibility of the war. We get a new glimpse of Abner's character here. If there was a fact that might be held to be beyond the possibility of question, it was that Abner had begun the contest. Had not he, in opposition to the Divine King of the nation, set up Ishbosheth against the man called by Jehovah? Had not he gathered the army at Mahanaim, and moved towards Gibeon, on express purpose to exclude David, and secure for his nominee what might be counted in reality, and not in name only, the kingdom of Israel? Yet he insolently demanded of Joab, "Shall the sword devour for ever?" He audaciously applies to Joab a maxim that he had not thought of applying to himself in the morning—"Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?" This is a war that can be terminated only by the destruction of one half of the nation; it will be a bitter enough consummation, which half soever it may be. Have you no regard for your "brethren," against whom you are fighting, that you are holding on in this remorseless way?

It may be a marvellously clever thing, in this audacious manner, to throw upon an opponent all the blame which is obviously one's own. But no good man will do so. The audacity that ascribes its own sins to an opponent is surely the token of a very evil nature. We have no reason to form a very high opinion of Joab, but of his opponent in this strife our judgment must be far worse. An insincere man, Abner could have no high end before him. If David was not happy in his general, still less was Ishbosheth in his.

Joab's answer betrayed a measure of indignation. "As God liveth, unless thou hadst spoken, surely then in the morning the people had gone up every one from following his brother." There is some ambiguity in these words. The Revised Version renders, "If thou hadst not spoken, surely then in the morning the people had gone away, nor followed every one his brother." The meaning of Joab seems to be that, apart from any such ill-tempered appeal as Abner's, it was his full intention in the morning to recall his men from the pursuit, and let Abner and his people go home without further harm. Joab shows the indignation of one credited with a purpose he never had, and with an inhumanity and unbrotherliness of which he was innocent. Why Joab had resolved to give up further hostilities at that time, we are not told. One might have thought that had he struck another blow at Abner he might have so harassed his force as to ruin his cause, and thus secure at once the triumph of David. But Joab probably felt very keenly what Abner accused him of not feeling: that it was a miserable thing to destroy the lives of so many brethren. The idea of building up David's throne on the dead bodies of his subjects he must have known to be extremely distasteful to David

himself. Civil war is such a horrible thing, that a general may well be excused who accepts any reason for stopping it. If Joab had known what was to follow, he might have taken a different course. If he had foreseen the "long war" that was to be between the house of Saul and the house of David, he might have tried on this occasion to strike a decisive blow, and pursued Abner's men until they were utterly broken. But that day's work had probably sickened him, as he knew it would sicken David; and leaving Abner and his people to make their way across the Jordan, he returned to bury his brother, and to report his proceedings to David at Hebron.

And David must have grieved exceedingly when he heard what had taken place. The slaughter of nearly four hundred of God's nation was a terrible thought; still more terrible it was to think that in a sense he had been the occasion of it—it was done to prevent him from occupying the throne. No doubt he had reason to be thankful that when fighting had to be done, the issue was eminently favourable to him and his cause. But he must have been grieved that there should be fighting at all. He must have felt somewhat as the Duke of Wellington felt when he made the observation that next to the calamity of losing a battle was that of gaining a victory. Was this what Samuel had meant when he came that morning to Bethlehem and anointed him in presence of his family? Was this what God designed when He was pleased to put him in the place of Saul? If this was a sample of what David was to bring to his beloved people, would it not have been better had he never been born? Very strange must God's ways have appeared to him. How different were his desires, how different his dreams of what

should be done when he got the kingdom, from this day's work! Often he had thought how he would drive out the enemies of his people; how he would secure tranquillity and prosperity to every Hebrew homestead; how he would aim at their all living under their vine and under their fig-tree, none making them afraid. But now his reign had begun with bloodshed, and already desolation had been carried to hundreds of his people's homes. Was this the work, O God, for which Thou didst call me from the sheep-folds? Should I not have been better employed "following the ewes great with young," and protecting my flock from the lion and the bear, rather than sending forth men to stain the soil of the land with the blood of the people and carry to their habitations the voice of mourning and woe?

If David's mind was exercised in this way by the proceedings near the pool of Gibeon, all his trust and patience would be needed to wait for the time when God would vindicate His way. After all, was not his experience somewhat like that of Moses when he first set about the deliverance of his people? Did he not appear to do more harm than good? Instead of lightening the burdens of his people, did he not cause an increase of their weight? But has it not been the experience of most men who have girded themselves for great undertakings in the interest of their brethren? Nay, was it not the experience of our blessed Lord Himself? At His birth the angels sang, "Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace; goodwill to men!" And almost the next event was the massacre at Bethlehem, and Jesus Himself even in His lifetime found cause to say, "Think not that I am come to send peace on the earth; I am not come to send peace, but a sword." What a sad evidence of the moral disorder of the

world! The very messengers of the God of peace are not allowed to deliver their messages in peace, but even as they advance toward men with smiles and benedictions, are fiercely assailed, and compelled to defend themselves by violence. Nevertheless the angels' song is true. Jesus did come to bless the world with peace. "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you." The resistance of His enemies was essentially a feeble resistance, and that stronger spirit of peace which Jesus brought in due time prevailed mightily in the earth. So with the bloodshed in David's reign. It did not hinder David from being a great benefactor to his kingdom in the end. It did not annul the promise of God. It did not neutralise the efficacy of the holy oil. This was just one of the many ways in which his faith and his patience were tried. It must have shown him even more impressively than anything that had yet happened the absolute necessity of Divine direction in all his ways. For it is far easier for a good man to bear suffering brought on himself by his actions, than to see suffering and death entailed on his brethren in connection with a course which has been taken by him.

In that audacious speech which Abner addressed to Joab, there occurs an expression worthy of being taken out of the connection in which it was used and of being viewed with wider reference. "Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?" Things are to be viewed by rational beings not merely in their present or immediate result, but in their final outcome, in their ultimate fruits. A very commonplace truth, I grant you, this is, but most wholesome, most necessary to be cherished. For how many of the

miseries and how many of the worst sins of men come of forgetting the "bitterness in the latter end" which evil beginnings give rise to! It is one of the most wholesome rules of life never to do to-day what you shall repent of to-morrow. Yet how constantly is the rule disregarded! Youthful child of fortune, who are revelling to-day in wealth which is counted by hundreds of thousands, and which seems as if it could never be exhausted, remember how dangerous those gambling habits are into which you are falling; remember that the gambler's biography is usually a short, and often a tragic, one; and when you hear the sound of the pistol with which one like yourself has ended his miserable existence, remember it all began by disregarding the motto, written over the gambler's path, "Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?" You merry-hearted and amusing companion, to whom the flowing bowl, and the jovial company, and the merry jest and lively song are so attractive, the more you are tempted to go where they are found remember that rags and dishonour, dirt and degradation, form the last stage of the journey,—"the latter end bitterness" of the course you are now following. You who are wasting in idleness the hours of the morning, remember how you will repent of it when you have to make up your leeway by hard toil at night. I have said that things are to be viewed by rational beings in their relations to the future as well as the present. It is not the part of a rational being to accumulate disaster, distress, and shame for the future. Men that are rational will far rather suffer for the present if they may be free from suffering hereafter. Benefit societies, life insurance, annuity schemes—what are they all but the

devices of sensible men desirous to ward off even the possibility of temporal "bitterness in the latter end"? And may not this wisdom, this good sense, be applied with far more purpose to the things that are unseen and eternal? Think of the "bitterness in the end" that must come of neglecting Christ, disregarding conscience, turning away from the Bible, the church, the Sabbath, grieving the Spirit, neglecting prayer! Will not many a foretaste of this bitterness visit you even while yet you are well, and all things are prospering with you? Will it not come on you with overpowering force while you lie on your death-bed? Will it not wrap your soul in indescribable anguish through all eternity?

Think then of this "bitterness in the latter end"! Now is the accepted time. In the deep consciousness of your weakness, let your prayer be that God would restrain you from the folly to which your hearts are so prone, that, by His Holy Spirit, He would work in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

CHAPTER IV.

CONCLUSION OF THE CIVIL WAR.

2 SAMUEL iii. 1—21.

THE victory at the pool of Gibeon was far from ending the opposition to David. In vain, for many a day, weary eyes looked out for the dove with the olive leaf. "There was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David." The war does not seem to have been carried on by pitched battles, but rather by a long series of those fretting and worrying little skirmishes which a state of civil war breeds, even when the volcano is comparatively quiet. But the drift of things was manifest. "David waxed stronger and stronger; but the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker." The cause of the house of Saul was weak in its invisible support because God was against it; it was weak in its champion Ishbosheth, a feeble man, with little or no power to attract people to his standard; its only element of strength was Abner, and even he could not make head against such odds. Good and evil so often seem to balance each other, existing side by side in a kind of feeble stagnation, and giving rise to such a dull feeling on the part of onlookers, that we cannot but think with something like envy of the followers of David even under the pain of a civil war,

cheered as they were by constant proofs that their cause was advancing to victory.

And now we get a glimpse of David's domestic mode of life, which, indeed, is far from satisfactory. His wives were now six in number; of some of them we know nothing; of the rest what we do know is not always in their favour. The earliest of all was "Ahinoam, the Jezreelitess." Her native place, or the home of her family, was Jezreel, that part of the plain of Esdraelon where the Philistines encamped before Saul was defeated (1 Sam. xxix. 12), and afterwards, in the days of Ahab, a royal residence of the kings of Israel (1 Kings xviii. 46) and the abode of Naboth, who refused to part with his vineyard in Jezreel to the king (1 Kings xxi.). Of Ahinoam we find absolutely no mention in the history; if her son Amnon, the oldest of David's family, reflected her character, we have no reason to regret the silence (2 Sam. xiii.). The next of his wives was Abigail, the widow of Nabal the Carmelite, of whose smartness and excellent management we have a full account in a former part of the history. Her son is called Chileab, but in the parallel passage in Chronicles Daniel; we can only guess the reason of the change; but whether it was another name for the same son, or the name of another son, the history is silent concerning him, and the most probable conjecture is that he died early. His third wife was Maachah, the daughter of Talmai the Geshurite. This was not, as some have rather foolishly supposed, a member of those Geshurites in the south against whom David led his troop (1 Sam. xxvii. 8), for it is expressly stated that of that tribe "he left neither man nor woman alive." It was of Geshur in Syria that Talmai was king (2 Sam. xv. 8); it

formed one of several little principalities lying between Mount Hermon and Damascus: but we cannot commend the alliance; for these kingdoms were idolatrous, and unless Maachah was an exception, she must have introduced idolatrous practices into David's house. Of the other three wives we have no information. And in regard to the household which he thus established at Hebron, we can only regret that the king of Israel did not imitate the example that had been set there by Abraham, and followed in the same neighbourhood by Isaac. What a different complexion would have been given to David's character and history if he had shown the self-control in this matter that he showed in his treatment of Saul! Of how many grievous sins and sorrows did he sow the seed when he thus multiplied wives to himself! How many a man, from his own day down to the days of Mormonism, did he silently encourage in licentious conduct, and furnish with a respectable example and a plausible excuse for it! How difficult did he make it for many who cannot but acknowledge the bright aspect of his spiritual life to believe that even in that it was all good and genuine! We do not hesitate to ascribe to the life of David an influence on successive generations on the whole pure and elevating; but it is impossible not to own that by many, a justification of relaxed principle and unchaste living has been drawn from his example.

We have already said that polygamy was not imputed to David as a sin in the sense that it deprived him of the favour of God. But we cannot allow that this permission was of the nature of a boon. We cannot but feel how much better it would have been if the seventh commandment had been read by David with the same absolute, unbending limitation with which it is read by

us. It would have been better for him and better for his house. Puritan strictness of morals is, after all, a right wholesome and most blessed thing. Who shall say that the sum of a man's enjoyment is not far greatest in the end of life when he has kept with unflinching steadfastness his early vow of faithfulness, and, as his reward, has never lost the freshness and the flavour of his first love, nor ceased to find in his ever-faithful partner that which fills and satisfies his heart? Compared to this, the life of him who has flitted from one attachment to another, heedless of the soured feelings or, it may be, the broken hearts he has left behind, and whose children, instead of breathing the sweet spirit of brotherly and sisterly love, scowl at one another with the bitter feelings of envy, jealousy, and hatred, is like an existence of wild fever compared to the pure tranquil life of a child.

In such a household as David's, occasions of estrangement must have been perpetually arising among the various branches, and it would require all his wisdom and gentleness to keep these quarrels within moderate bounds. In his own breast, that sense of delicacy, that instinct of purity, which exercises such an influence on a godly family, could not have existed; the necessity of reining in his inclinations in that respect was not acknowledged; and it is remarkable that in the confessions of the fifty-first Psalm, while he specifies the sins of blood-guiltiness and seems to have been overwhelmed by a sense of his meanness, injustice, and selfishness, there is no special allusion to the sin of adultery, and no indication of that sin pressing very heavily upon his conscience.

Whether it be by design or not, it is an instructive circumstance that it is immediately after this glimpse

of David's domestic life that we meet with a sample of the kind of evils which the system of royal harems is ever apt to produce. Saul too had had his harem; and it was a rule of succession in the East that the harem went with the throne. To take possession of the one was regarded as equivalent to setting up a claim to the other. When therefore Ishbosheth heard that Abner had taken one of his father's concubines, he looked on it as a proof that Abner had an eye to the throne for himself. He accordingly demanded an explanation from Abner, but instead of explanation or apology, he received a volley of rudeness and defiance. Abner knew well that without him Ishbosheth was but a figure-head, and he was enraged by treatment that seemed to overlook all the service he had rendered him and to treat him as if he were some second or third-rate officer of a firm and settled kingdom. Perhaps Abner had begun to see that the cause of Ishbosheth was hopeless, and was even glad in his secret heart of an excuse for abandoning an undertaking which could bring neither success nor honour. "Am I a dog's head, which against Judah do show kindness this day unto the house of Saul thy father, to his brethren, and to his friends, and have not delivered thee into the hand of David, that thou chargest me to-day with a fault concerning this woman? So do God to Abner, and more also, except, as the Lord hath sworn to David, even so I do to him, to translate the kingdom from the house of Saul, and to set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah from Dan even to Beersheba."

The proverb says, "When rogues fall out, honest men get their own." How utterly unprincipled the effort of Abner and Ishbosheth was is evident from the confession of the former that God had sworn to

David to establish his throne over the whole land. Their enterprise therefore bore impiety on its very face; and we can only account for their setting their hands to it on the principle that keen thirst for worldly advantage will drive ungodly men into virtual atheism, as if God were no factor in the affairs of men, as if it mattered not that He was against them, and that it is only when their schemes show signs of coming to ruin that they awake to the consciousness that there is a God after all! And how often we see that godless men banded together have no firm bond of union; the very passions which they are united to gratify begin to rage against one another; they fall into the pit which they digged for others; they are hanged on the gallows which they erected for their foes.

The next step in the narrative brings us to Abner's offer to David to make a league with him for the undisputed possession of the throne. Things had changed now very materially from that day when, in the wilderness of Judah, David reproached Abner for his careless custody of the king's person (1 Sam. xxvi. 14). What a picture of feebleness David had seemed then, while Saul commanded the whole resources of the kingdom! Yet in that day of weakness David had done a noble deed, a deed made nobler by his very weakness, and he had thereby shown to any that had eyes to see which party it was that had God on its side. And now this truth concerning him, against which Abner had kicked and struggled in vain, was asserting itself in a way not to be resisted. Yet even now there is no trace of humility in the language of Abner. He plays the great man still. "Behold, my hand shall be with thee, to bring about all Israel to thee." He approaches King David, not as one who

has done him a great wrong, but as one who offers to do him a great favour. There is no word of regret for his having opposed what he knew to be God's purpose and promise, no apology for the disturbance he had wrought in Israel, no excuse for all the distress which he had caused to David by keeping the kingdom and the people at war. He does not come as a rebel to his sovereign, but as one independent man to another. Make a league with me. Secure me from punishment; promise me a reward. For this he simply offers to place at David's disposal that powerful hand of his that had been so mighty for evil. If he expected that David would leap into his arms at the mention of such an offer, he was mistaken. This was not the way for a rebel to come to his king. David was too much dissatisfied with his past conduct, and saw too clearly that it was only stress of weather that was driving him into harbour now, to show any great enthusiasm about his offer. On the contrary, he laid down a stiff preliminary condition; and with the air of one who knew his place and his power, he let Abner know that if that condition were not complied with, he should not see his face. We cannot but admire the firmness shown in this mode of meeting Abner's advances; but we are somewhat disappointed when we find what the condition was—that Michal, Saul's daughter, whom he had espoused for a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, should be restored to him as his wife. The demand was no doubt a righteous one, and it was reasonable that David should be vindicated from the great slur cast on him when his wife was given to another; moreover, it was fitted to test the genuineness of Abner's advances, to show whether he really meant to acknowledge the royal rights of David; but we wonder that,

with six wives already about him, he should be so eager for another, and we shrink from the reason given for the restoration—not that the marriage tie was inviolable, but that he had paid for her a very extraordinary dowry. And most readers, too, will feel some sympathy with the second husband, who seems to have had a strong affection for Michal, and who followed her weeping, until the stern military voice of Abner compelled him to return. All we can say about him is, that his sin lay in receiving another man's wife and treating her as his own; the beginning of the connection was unlawful, although the manner of its ending on his part was creditable. Connections formed in sin must sooner or later end in suffering; and the tears of Phaltiel would not have flowed now if that unfortunate man had acted firmly and honourably when Michal was taken from David.

But it is not likely that in this demand for the restoration of Michal David acted on purely personal considerations. He does not seem to have been above the prevalent feeling of the East which measured the authority and dignity of the monarch by the rank and connections of his wives. Moreover, as David laid stress on the way in which he got Michal as his wife, it is likely that he desired to recall attention to his early exploits against the Philistines. He had probably found that his recent alliance with King Achish had brought him into suspicion; he wished to remind the people therefore of his ancient services against those bitter and implacable enemies of Israel, and to encourage the expectation of similar exploits in the future. The purpose which he thus seems to have had in view was successful. For when Abner soon after made a representation to the elders of Israel in favour of King David

and reminded them of the promise which God had made regarding him, it was to this effect: "By the hand of My servant David I will save My people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines and out of the hand of all their enemies." It seems to have been a great step towards David's recognition by the whole nation that they came to have confidence in him in leading them against the Philistines. Thus he received a fresh proof of the folly of his distrustful conclusion, "There is nothing better for me than that I should escape into the land of the Philistines." It became more and more apparent that nothing could have been worse.

One is tempted to wonder if David ever sat down to consider what would probably have happened if, instead of going over to the Philistines, he had continued to abide in the wilderness of Judah, braving the dangers of the place and trusting in the protection of his God. Some sixteen months after, the terrible invasion of the Philistines took place, and Saul, overwhelmed with terror and despair, was at his wits' end for help. How natural it would have been for him in that hour of despair to send for David if he had been still in the country and ask his aid! How much more in his own place would David have appeared bravely fronting the Philistines in battle, than hovering in the rear of Achish and pretending to feel himself treated ill because the Philistine lords had required him to be sent away! Might he not have been the instrument of saving his country from defeat and disgrace? And if Saul and Jonathan had fallen in the battle, would not the whole nation have turned as one man to him, and would not that long and cruel civil war have been entirely averted? It is needless to go back on the past and think how much better we could have acted if unavailing regret is

to be the only result of the process; but it is a salutary and blessed exercise if it tends to fix in our minds—what we doubt not it fixed in David's—how infinitely better for us it is to follow the course marked out for us by our heavenly Father, with all its difficulties and dangers, than to walk in the light of our own fire and in the sparks of our own kindling.

It appears that Abner set himself with great vigour to fulfil the promise made by him in his league with David. First, he held communication with the representatives of the whole nation, "the elders of Israel," and showed to them, as we have seen—no doubt to his own confusion and self-condemnation—how God had designated David as the king through whom deliverance would be granted to Israel from the Philistines and all their other enemies. Next, remembering that Saul was a member of the tribe of Benjamin, and believing that the feeling in favour of his family would be eminently strong in that tribe, he took special pains to attach them to David, and as he was himself likewise a Benjamite, he must have been eminently useful in this service. Thirdly, he went in person to Hebron, David's seat, to speak in the ears of David all that seemed good to Israel and to the whole house of Benjamin." Finally, after being entertained by David at a great feast, he set out to bring about a meeting of the whole congregation of Israel, that they might solemnly ratify the appointment of David as king, in the same way as, in the early days of Saul, Samuel had convened the representatives of the nation at Gilgal (1 Sam. xi. 15). That in all this Abner was rendering a great service both to David and the nation cannot be doubted. He was doing what no other man in Israel could have done at the time for

establishing the throne of David and ending the civil war. Having once made overtures to David, he showed an honourable promptitude in fulfilling the promise under which he had come. No man can atone for past sin by doing his duty at a future time; but if anything could have blotted out from David's memory the remembrance of Abner's great injury to him and to the nation, it was the zeal with which he exerted himself now to establish David's claims over all the country, and especially where his cause was feeblest—in the tribe of Benjamin.

It must have been a happy day in David's history when Abner set out from Hebron to convene the assembly of the tribes that was to call him with one voice to the throne. It was the day long looked for come at last. The dove had at length come with the olive leaf, and peace would now reign among all the tribes of Israel. And we may readily conceive him, with this prospect so near, expressing his feelings, if not in the very words of the thirty-seventh Psalm, at any rate in language of similar import:—

"Fret not thyself because of evil-doers,
Neither be thou envious against them that work unrighteousness
For they shall soon be cut down like the grass,
And wither as the green herb.
Trust in the Lord and do good;
Dwell in the land, and follow after faithfulness.
Delight thyself also in the Lord,
And He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.
Commit thy way unto the Lord,
Trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.
And He shall make thy righteousness to go forth as the light,
And thy judgment as the noonday.
Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him;
Fret not thyself because of him that prospereth in his way,
Because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.

For evil-doers shall be cut off;
But those that wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the land."

But a crime was now on the eve of being perpetrated destined for the time to scatter all King David's pleasing expectations and plunge him anew into the depths of distress,

CHAPTER V.

ASSASSINATION OF ABNER AND ISHBOSHETH.

2 Samuel iii. 22—39; iv.

IT is quite possible that, in treating with Abner, David showed too complacent a temper, that he treated too lightly his appearance in arms against him at the pool of Gibeon, and that he neglected to demand an apology for the death of Asahel. Certainly it would have been wise had some measures been taken to soothe the ruffled temper of Joab and reconcile him to the new arrangement This, however, was not done. David was so happy in the thought that the civil war was to cease, and that all Israel were about to recognise him as their king, that he would not go back on the past, or make reprisals even for the death of Asahel. He was willing to let bygones be bygones. Perhaps, too, he thought that if Asahel met his death at the hand of Abner, it was his own rashness that was to blame for it. Anyhow he was greatly impressed with the value of Abner's service on his behalf, and much interested in the project to which he was now going forth—gathering all Israel to the king, to make a league with him and bind themselves to his allegiance.

In these measures Joab had not been consulted. When Abner was at Hebron, Joab was absent on a military enterprise. In that enterprise he had been

very successful, and he was able to appear at Hebron with the most popular evidence of success that a general could bring—a large amount of spoil. No doubt Joab was elated with his success, and was in that very temper when a man is most disposed to resent his being overlooked and to take more upon him than is meet. When he heard of David's agreement with Abner, he was highly displeased. First he went to the king, and scolded him for his simplicity in believing Abner. It was but a stratagem of Abner's to allow him to come to Hebron, ascertain the state of David's affairs, and take his own steps more effectively in the interest of his opponent, Suspicion reigned in Joab's heart; the generosity of David's nature was not only not shared by him, but seemed silliness itself. His rudeness to David is highly offensive. He speaks to him in the tone of a master to a servant, or in the tone of those servants who rule their master. "What hast thou done? Behold, Abner came unto thee; why is it that thou hast sent him away, and he is quite gone? Thou knowest Abner the son of Ner, that he came to deceive thee, and to know thy going out and thy coming in, and to know all that thou doest." David is spoken to like one guilty of inexcusable folly, as if he were accountable to Joab, and not Joab to him. Of the king's answer to Joab, nothing is recorded; but from David's confession (ver. 39) that the sons of Zeruiah were too strong for him, we may infer that it was not very firm or decided, and that Joab set it utterly at nought. For the very first thing that Joab did after seeing the king was to send a message to Abner, most likely in David's name, but without David's knowledge, asking him to return. Joab was at the gate ready for his treacherous business, and taking Abner aside as if

for private conversation, he plunged his dagger in his breast, ostensibly in revenge for the death of his brother Asahel. There was something eminently mean and dastardly in the deed. Abner was now on the best of terms with Joab's master, and he could not have apprehended danger from the servant. If assassination be mean among civilians, it is eminently mean among soldiers. The laws of hospitality were outraged when one who had just been David's guest was assassinated in David's city. The outrage was all the greater, as was also the injury to King David and to the whole kingdom, that the crime was committed when Abner was on the eve of an important and delicate negotiation with the other tribes of Israel, since the arrangement which he hoped to bring about was likely to be broken off by the news of his shameful death. At no moment are the feelings of men less to be trifled with than when, after long and fierce alienation, they are on the point of coming together. Abner had brought the tribes of Israel to that point, but now, like a flock of birds frightened by a shot, they were certain to fly asunder. All this danger Joab set at nought, the one thought of taking revenge for the death of his brother absorbing every other, and making him, like so many other men when excited by a guilty passion, utterly regardless of every consequence provided only his revenge was satisfied.

How did David act toward Joab? Most kings would at once have put him to death, and David's subsequent action towards the murderers of Ishbosheth shows that, even in his judgment, this would have been the proper retribution on Joab for his bloody deed. But David did not feel himself strong enough to deal with Joab according to his deserts. It might have

been better for him during the rest of his life if he had acted with more vigour now. But instead of making an example of Joab, he contented himself with pouring out on him a vial of indignation, publicly washing his hands of the nefarious transaction, and pronouncing on its author and his family a terrible malediction. We cannot but shrink from the way in which David brought in Joab's family to share his curse: "Let there not fail from the house of Joab one that hath an issue, or that is a leper, or that leaneth on a staff, or that falleth on the sword, or that lacketh bread." Yet we must remember that according to the sentiment of those times a man and his house were so identified that the punishment due to the head was regarded as due to the whole. In our day we see a law in constant operation which visits iniquities of the parents upon the children with a terrible retribution. The drunkard's children are woeful sufferers for their parent's sin; the family of the felon carries a stigma for ever. We recognise this as a law of Providence; but we do not act on it ourselves in inflicting punishment. In David's time, however, and throughout the whole Old Testament period, punishments due to the fathers were formally shared by their families. When Joshua sentenced Achan to die for his crime in stealing from the spoils of Jericho a wedge of gold and a Babylonish garment, his wife and children were put to death along with him. In denouncing the curse on Joab's family as well as himself, David therefore only recognised a law which was universally acted on in his day. The law may have been a hard one, but we are not to blame David for acting on a principle of retribution universally acknowledged. We are to remember, too, that David was now acting in a public capacity, and as the chief

magistrate of the nation. If he had put Joab to death, his act would have involved his family in many a woe; in denouncing his deeds and calling for retribution on them generation after generation, he only carried out the same principle a little further. That Joab deserved to die for his dastardly crime, none could have denied; if David abstained from inflicting that punishment, it was only natural that he should be very emphatic in proclaiming what such a criminal might look for, in never-failing visitations on himself and his seed, when he was left to be dealt with by the God of justice.

Having thus disposed of Joab, David had next to dispose of the dead body of Abner. He determined that every circumstance connected with Abner's funeral should manifest the sincerity of his grief at his untimely end. In the first place, he caused him to be buried at Hebron. We know of the tomb at Hebron where the bodies of the patriarchs lay; if it was at all legitimate to place others in that grave, we may believe that a place in it was found for Abner. In the second place, the mourning company attended the funeral with rent clothes and girdings of sackcloth, while the king himself followed the bier, and at the grave both king and people gave way to a burst of tears. In the third place, the king pronounced an elegy over him, short, but expressive of his sense of the unworthy death which had come to such a man:—

"Should Abner die as a fool dieth?
Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters;
As a man falleth before the children of iniquity, so didst thou fall."

Had he died the death of one taken in battle, his bound hands and his feet in fetters would have denoted that after honourable conflict he had been defeated in

the field, and that he died the death due to a public enemy. Instead of this, he had fallen before the children of iniquity, before men mean enough to betray him and murder him, while he was under the protection of the king. In the fourth place, he sternly refused to eat bread till that day, so full of darkness and infamy, should have passed away. The public manifestations of David's grief showed very clearly how far he was from approving of the death of Abner. And they had the desired effect. The people were pleased with the evidence afforded of David's feelings, and the event that had seemed likely to destroy his prospects turned out in this way in his favour. "The people took notice of this, and it pleased them, as whatsoever the king did pleased all the people." It was another evidence of the conquering power of goodness and forbearance. By his generous treatment of his foes, David secured a position in the hearts of his people, and established his kingdom on a basis of security which he could not have obtained by any amount of severity. For ages and ages, the two methods of dealing with a reluctant people, generosity and severity, have been pitted against each other, and always with the effect that severity fails and generosity succeeds. There were many who were indignant at the clemency shown by Lord Canning after the Indian mutiny. They would have had him inspire terror by acts of awful severity. But the peaceful career of our Indian empire and the absence of any attempt to renew the insurrection since that time show that the policy of clemency was the policy of wisdom and of success.

Still another step was taken by David that shows how painfully he was impressed by the death of Abner. To "his servants"—that is, his cabinet or his staff—he

said in confidence, "Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?" He recognised in Abner one of those men of consummate ability who are born to rule, or at least to render the highest service to the actual ruler of a country by their great influence over men. It seems very probable that he looked to him as his own chief officer for the future. Rebel though he had been, he seemed quite cured of his rebellion, and now that he cordially acknowledged David's right to the throne, he would probably have been his right-hand man. Abner, Saul's cousin, was probably a much older man than Joab, who was David's nephew, and who could not have been much older than David himself. The loss of Abner was a great personal loss especially as it threw him more into the hands of these sons of Zeruiah, Joab and Abishai, whose impetuous, lordly temper was too much for him to restrain. The representation to his confidential servants, "I am weak, and these men, the sons of Zeruiah, are too strong for me," was an appeal to them for cordial help in the affairs of the kingdom, in order that Joab and his brother might not be able to carry everything their own way. David, like many another man, needed to say, Save me from my friends. We get a vivid glimpse of the perplexities of kings, and of the compensations of a humbler lot. Men in high places, worried by the difficulties of managing their affairs and servants, and by the endless annoyances to which their jealousies and their self-will give rise, may find much to envy in the simple, unembarrassed life of the humblest of the people.

From the assassination of Abner, the real source of the opposition that had been raised to David, the narrative proceeds to the assassination of Ishbosheth,

the titular king. "When Saul's son heard that Abner was dead in Hebron, his hands were feeble, and all the Israelites were troubled." The contrast is striking between his conduct under difficulty and that of David. In the history of the latter, faith often faltered in times of trouble, and the spirit of distrust found a footing in his soul. But these occasions occurred in the course of protracted and terrible struggles; they were exceptions to his usual bearing; faith commonly bore him up in his darkest trials. Ishbosheth, on the other hand, seems to have had no resource, no sustaining power whatever, under visible reverses. David's slips were like the temporary falling back of the gallant soldier when surprised by a sudden onslaught, or when, fagged and weary, he is driven back by superior numbers; but as soon as he has recovered himself, he dashes back undaunted to the conflict. Ishbosheth was like the soldier who throws down his arms and rushes from the field as soon as he feels the bitter storm of battle. With all his falls, there was something in David that showed him to be cast in a different mould from ordinary men. He was habitually aiming at a higher standard, and upheld by the consciousness of a higher strength; he was ever and anon resorting to "the secret place of the Most High," taking hold of Him as his covenant God, and labouring to draw down from Him the inspiration and the strength of a nobler life than that of the mass of the children of men.

The godless course which Ishbosheth had followed in setting up a claim to the throne in opposition to the Divine call of David not only lost him the distinction he coveted, but cost him his life. He made himself a mark for treacherous and heartless men; and one day, while lying in his bed at noon, was despatched by

two of his servants. The two men that murdered him seem to have been among those whom Saul enriched with the spoil of the Gibeonites. They were brothers, men of Beeroth, which was formerly one of the cities of the Gibeonites, but was now reckoned to Benjamin.

Saul appears to have attacked the Beerothites, and given their property to his favourites (comp. 1 Sam. xxii. 7 and 2 Sam. xxi. 2). A curse went with the transaction; Ishbosheth, one of Saul's sons, was murdered by two of those who were enriched by the unhallowed deed; and many years after, his bloody house had to yield up seven of his sons to justice, when a great famine showed that for this crime wrath rested on the land.

The murderers of Ishbosheth, Baanah and Rechab, mistaking the character of David as much as it had been mistaken by the Amalekite who pretended that he had slain Saul, hastened to Hebron, bearing with them the head of their victim, a ghastly evidence of the reality of the deed. This revolting trophy they carried all the way from Mahanaim to Hebron, a distance of some fifty miles. Mean and selfish themselves, they thought other men must be the same. They were among those poor creatures who are unable to rise above their own poor level in their conceptions of others. When they presented themselves before David, he showed all his former superiority to selfish, jealous feelings. He was roused indeed to the highest pitch of indignation. We can hardly conceive the astonishment and horror with which they would receive his answer, "As the Lord liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity, when one told me saying, Behold, Saul is dead, thinking to have brought good tidings, I took hold on him and slew him in Ziklag,

who thought that I would have given him a reward for his tidings. How much more when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed! Shall I not therefore require his blood at your hand, and take you away from the earth?" Simple death was not judged a severe enough punishment for such guilt: as they had cut off the head of Ishbosheth after killing him, so after they were slain their hands and their feet were cut off; and thereafter they were hanged over the pool in Hebron—a token of the execration in which the crime was held. Here was another evidence that deeds of violence done to his rivals, so far from finding acceptance, were detestable in the eyes of David. And here was another fulfilment of the resolution which he had made when he took possession of the throne—"I will early destroy all the wicked of the land, that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord."

These rapid, instantaneous executions by order of David have raised painful feelings in many. Granting that the retribution was justly deserved, and granting that the rapidity of the punishment was in accord with military law, ancient and modern, and that it was necessary in order to make a due impression on the people, still it may be asked, How could David, as a pious man, hurry these sinners into the presence of their Judge without giving them any exhortation to repentance or leaving them a moment in which to ask for mercy? The question is undoubtedly a difficult one. But the difficulty arises in a great degree from our ascribing to David and others the same knowledge of the future state and the same vivid impressions regarding it that we have ourselves. We often forget that to those who lived in the Old Testament the future life was wrapped

in far greater obscurity than it is to us. That good men had no knowledge of it, we cannot allow; but certainly they knew vastly less about it than has been revealed to us. And the general effect of this was that the consciousness of a future life was much fainter even among good men then than now. They did not think about it; it was not present to their thoughts. There is no use trying to make David either a wiser or a better man than he was. There is no use trying to place him high above the level or the light of his age. If it be asked, How did David feel with reference to the future life of these men? the answer is, that probably it was not much, if at all, in his thoughts. That which was prominent in his thoughts was that they had sacrificed their lives by their atrocious wickedness, and the sooner they were punished the better. If he thought of their future, he would feel that they were in the hands of God, and that they would be judged by Him according to the tenor of their lives. It cannot be said that compassion for them mingled with David's feelings. The one prominent feeling he had was that of their guilt; for that they must suffer. And David, like other soldiers who have shed much blood, was so accustomed to the sight of violent death, that the horror which it usually excites was no longer familiar to him.

It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ that has brought life and immortality to light. So far from the future life being a dim and shadowy revelation, it is now one of the clearest doctrines of the faith. It is one of the doctrines which every earnest preacher of the Gospel is profoundly earnest in dwelling on. That death ushers us into the presence of God, that after death cometh the judgment, that every one of us is to give account of himself to God, that the final condition of

men is to be one of misery or one of life, are among the clearest revelations of the Gospel. And this fact invests every man's death with profound significance in the Christian's view. That the condemned criminal may have time to prepare, our courts of law invariably interpose an interval between the sentence and the punishment. Would only that men were more consistent here! If we shudder at the thought of a dying sinner appearing in all the blackness of his guilt before God, let us think more how we may turn sinners from their wickedness while they live. Let us see the atrocious guilt of encouraging them in ways of sin that cannot but bring on them the retribution of a righteous God. O ye who, careless yourselves, laugh at the serious impressions and scruples of others; ye who teach those that would otherwise do better to drink and gamble and especially to scoff; ye who do your best to frustrate the prayers of tender-hearted fathers and mothers whose deepest desire is that their children may be saved; ye, in one word, who are missionaries of the devil and help to people hell—would that you pondered your awful guilt! For "whosoever shall cause any of the least of these to offend, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were cast into the depths of the sea."

CHAPTER VI.

DAVID KING OF ALL ISRAEL.

2 SAMUEL V. 1—9.

AFTER seven and a half years of opposition,* David was now left without a rival, and the representatives of the whole tribes came to Hebron to anoint him king. They gave three reasons for their act, nearly all of which, however, would have been as valid at the death of Saul as they were at this time.

The first was that David and they were closely related—"Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh;" rather an unusual reason, but in the circumstances not unnatural. For David's alliance with the Philistines had thrown some doubt on his nationality; it was not very clear at that time whether he was to be regarded as a Hebrew or as a naturalized Philistine; but now the doubts that had existed on that point had all disappeared; conclusive evidence had been afforded that David was out-and-out a Hebrew, and therefore that he was not disqualified for the Hebrew throne.

* There is difficulty in adjusting all the dates. In chap. ii. 10, it is said that Ishbosheth reigned two years. The usual explanation is that he reigned two years before war broke out between him and David. Another supposition is that there was an interregnum in Israel of five and a half years, and that Ishbosheth reigned the last two years of David's seven and a half. The accuracy of the text has been questioned, and it has been proposed (on very slender MS. authority) to read that Ishbosheth reigned *six* years in place of two.

This conclusion is confirmed by what they give as their second reason—his former exploits and services against their enemies. "Also, in time past, when Saul was king, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel." In former days, David had proved himself Saul's most efficient lieutenant; he had been at the head of the armies of Israel, and his achievements in that capacity pointed to him as the fit and natural successor of Saul.

The third reason is the most conclusive—"The Lord said to thee, Thou shalt feed My people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel." It was little to the credit of the elders that this reason, which should have been the first, and which needed no other reasons to confirm it, was given by them as the last. The truth, however, is, that if they had made it their first and great reason, they would on the very face of their speech have condemned themselves. Why, if this was the command of God, had they been so long of carrying it out? Ought not effect to have been given to it at the very first, independent of all other reasons whatsoever? The elders cannot but give it a place among their reasons for offering him the throne; but it is not allowed to have its own place, and it is added to the others as if they needed to be supplemented before effect could be given to it. The elders did not show that supreme regard to the will of God which ought ever to be the first consideration in every loyal heart. It is the great offence of multitudes, even among those who make a Christian profession, that while they are willing to pay regard to God's will as one of many considerations, they are not prepared to pay supreme regard to it. It may be taken along with other considerations, but it is not allowed to be the chief con-

sideration. Religion may have a place in their life, but not the first place. But can a service thus rendered be acceptable to God? Can God accept the second or the third place in any man's regard? Does not the first commandment dispose of this question: "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me"?

"So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and King David made a league with them in Hebron before the Lord; and they anointed David king over Israel."

It was a happy circumstance that David was able to neutralise the effects of the murders of Abner and Ishbosheth, and to convince the people that he had no share in these crimes. Notwithstanding the prejudice against his side which in themselves they were fitted to create in the supporters of Saul's family, they did not cause any further opposition to his claims. The tact of the king removed any stumbling-block that might have arisen from these untoward events. And thus the throne of David was at last set up, amid the universal approval of the nation.

This was a most memorable event in David's history. It was the fulfilment of one great instalment of God's promises to him. It was fitted very greatly to deepen his trust in God, as his Protector and his Friend. To be able to look back on even one case of a Divine promise distinctly fulfilled to us is a great help to faith in all future time. For David to be able to look back on that early period of his life, so crowded with trials and sufferings, perplexities and dangers, and to mark how God had delivered him from every one of them, and, in spite of the fearful opposition that had been raised against him, had at last seated him firmly on the throne, was well fitted to advance the spirit of trust

to that place of supremacy which it gained in him. After such an overwhelming experience, it was little wonder that his trust in God became so strong, and his purpose to serve God so intense. The sorrows of death had compassed him, and the pains of Hades had taken hold on him, yet the Lord had been with him, and had most wonderfully delivered him. And in token of his deliverance he makes his vow of continual service, "O Lord, truly I am Thy servant; I am Thy servant and the son of Thine handmaid; Thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to Thee the sacrifices of praise, and will call upon the name of the Lord."

We can hardly pass from this event in David's history without recalling his typical relation to Him who in after-years was to be known as the "Son of David." The resemblance between the early history of David and that of our blessed Lord in some of its features is too obvious to need to be pointed out. Like David, Jesus spends His early years in the obscurity of a country village. Like him, He enters on His public life under a striking and convincing evidence of the Divine favour—David by conquering Goliath, Jesus by the descent of the Spirit at His baptism, and the voice from heaven which proclaimed, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Like David, soon after His Divine call Jesus is led out to the wilderness, to undergo hardship and temptation; but, unlike David, He conquers the enemy at every onset Like David, Jesus attaches to Himself a small but valiant band of followers, whose achievements in the spiritual warfare rival the deeds of David's "worthies" in the natural. Like David, Jesus is concerned for His relatives; David, in his extremity, commits his father and mother to the king of Moab: Jesus, on the cross, commits His mother

to the beloved disciple. In the higher exercises of David's spirit, too, there is much that resembles the experiences of Christ. The convincing proof of this is, that most of the Psalms which the Christian Church has ever held to be Messianic have their foundation in the experiences of David. It is impossible not to see that in one sense there must have been a measureless distance between the experience of a sinful man like David and that of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Divinity of His person, the atoning efficacy of His death, and the glory of His resurrection, Jesus is high above any of the sons of men. Yet there must likewise have been some marvellous similarity between Him and David, seeing that David's words of sorrow and of hope were so often accepted by Jesus to express His own emotions. Strange indeed it is that the words in which David, in the twenty-second Psalm, pours out the desolation of his spirit, were the words in which Jesus found expression for His unexampled distress upon the cross. Strange, too, that David's deliverances were so like Christ's that the same language does for both; nay, that the very words in which Jesus commended His soul to the Father, as it was passing from His body, were words which had first been used by David.

But it does not concern us at present to look so much at the general resemblances between David and our blessed Lord, as at the analogy in the fortunes of their respective kingdoms. And here the most obvious feature is the bitter opposition to their claims offered in both instances even by those who might have been expected most cordially to welcome them. Of both it might be said, "They came unto their own, but their own received them not." First, David is hunted almost to death by Saul; and then, even after Saul's death,

his claims are resisted by most of the tribes. So in His lifetime Jesus encounters all the hatred and opposition of the scribes and Pharisees; and even after His resurrection, the council do their utmost to denounce His claims and frighten His followers. Against the one and the other the enemy brings to bear all the devices of hatred and opposition. When Jesus rose from the grave, we see Him personally raised high above all the efforts of His enemies; when David was acknowledged king by all Israel, he reached a corresponding elevation. And now that David is recognised as king, how do we find him employing his energies? It is to defend and bless his kingdom, to obtain for it peace and prosperity, to expel its foes, to secure to the utmost of his power the welfare of all his people. From His throne in glory, Jesus does the same. And what encouragement may not the friends and subjects of Christ's kingdom derive from the example of David! For if David, once he was established in his kingdom, spared no effort to do good to his people, if he scattered blessings among them from the stores which he was able to command, how much more may Christ be relied on to do the same! Has He not been placed far above all principality and power, and every name that is named, and been made "Head over all things for the Church which is His body"? Rejoice then, ye members of Christ's kingdom! Raise your eyes to the throne of glory, and see how God has set His King upon His holy hill of Zion! And be encouraged to tell Him of all your own needs and the troubles and needs of His Church; for has He not ascended on high, and led captivity captive, and received gifts for men? And if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, will you not ask, and shall you not receive according to

your faith? Will not God supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus?

From the spectacle at Hebron, when all the elders of Israel confirmed David on the throne, and entered into a solemn league with reference to the kingdom, we pass with David to the field of battle. The first enterprise to which he addressed himself was the capture of Jerusalem, or rather of the stronghold of Zion. It is not expressly stated that he consulted God before taking this step, but we can hardly suppose that he would do it without Divine direction. From the days of Moses, God had taught His people that a place would be appointed by Him where He would set His name; Jerusalem was to be that place; and it cannot be thought that when David would not even go up to Hebron without consulting the Lord, he would proceed to make Jerusalem his capital without a Divine warrant.

No doubt the place was well known to him. It had already received consecration when Melchizedek reigned in it, "king of righteousness and king of peace." In the days of Joshua its king was Adonizedek, "lord of righteousness"—a noble title, brought down from the days of Melchizedek, however unworthy the bearer of it might be of the designation, for he was the head of the confederacy against Joshua (Josh. x. 1, 3), and he ended his career by being hanged on a tree. After the slaughter of the Philistine, David had carried his head to Jerusalem, or to some place so near that it might be called by that name; very probably Nob was the place, which, according to an old tradition, was situated on the slope of Mount Olivet. Often in his wanderings, when his mind was much occupied with

fortresses and defences, the image of this place would occur to him; observing how the mountains were round about Jerusalem, he would see how well it was adapted to be the metropolis of the country. But this could not be done while the stronghold of Zion was in the hands of the Jebusites, and while the Jebusites were so numerous that they might be called "the people of the land."

So impregnable was this stronghold deemed, that any attempt that David might make to get possession of it was treated with contempt. The precise circumstances of the siege are somewhat obscure; if we compare the marginal readings and the text in the Authorized Version, and still more in the Revised Version, we may see what difficulty our translators had in arriving at the meaning of the passage. The most probable supposition is that the Jebusites placed their lame and blind on the walls, to show how little artificial defence the place needed, and defied David to touch even these sorry defenders. Such defiance David could not but have regarded as he regarded the defiance of Goliath—as an insult to that mighty God in whose name and in whose strength he carried on his work. Advancing in the same strength in which he advanced against Goliath, he got possession of the stronghold. To stimulate the chivalry of his men he had promised the first place in his army to whoever, by means of the watercourse, should first get on the battlements and defeat the Jebusites. Joab was the man who made this daring and successful attempt. Reaping the promised reward, he thereby raised himself to the first place in the now united forces of the twelve tribes of Israel. After the murder of Abner, he had probably been degraded; but now, by his dash and bravery, he

established his position on a firmer basis than ever. While he contributed by this means to the security and glory of the kingdom, he diminished at the same time the king's personal satisfaction, inasmuch as David could not regard without anxiety the possession of so much power and influence by so daring and useful, but unscrupulous and bold-tempered, a man.

The place thus taken was called the city, and sometimes the castle, of David, and it became from this time his residence and the capital of his kingdom. Much though the various sites in Jerusalem have been debated, it is surely beyond reasonable doubt that the fortress thus occupied was Mount Zion, the same height which still exists in the south-western corner of the area which came to be covered by Jerusalem. This seems to have been the only part that the Jebusites had fortified, and with the loss of this stronghold their hold of other parts of Jerusalem was lost. Henceforth, as a people, they disappear from Jerusalem, although individual Jebusites might still, like Araunah, hold patches of land in the neighbourhood (2 Sam. xxiv. 16). The captured fortress was turned by David into his royal residence. And seeing that a military stronghold was very inadequate for the purposes of a capital, he began, by the building of Millo, that extension of the city which was afterwards carried out by others on so large a scale.

By thus taking possession of Mount Zion and commencing those extensions which helped to make Jerusalem so great and celebrated a city, David introduced two names into the sacred language of the Bible which have ever since retained a halo, surpassing all other names in the world. Yet, very obviously, it was nothing in the little hill which has borne the name of Zion for so

many centuries, nor in the physical features of the city of Jerusalem, that has given them their remarkable distinction. Neither is it for mere historical or intellectual associations, in the common sense of the term, that they have attained their eminence. It would not be difficult to find more picturesque rocks than Zion and more striking cities than Jerusalem. It would not be difficult to find places more memorable in art, in science, and intellectual culture. That which gives them their unrivalled pre-eminence is their relation to God's revelation of Himself to man. Zion was memorable because it was God's dwelling-place, Jerusalem because it was the city of the great King. If Jerusalem and Zion impress our imagination even above other places, it is because God had so much to do with them. The very idea of God makes them great.

But they impress much more than our imagination. We recall the unrivalled moral and spiritual forces that were concentrated there: the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the noble army of the martyrs, the glorious company of the apostles, all living under the shadow of Mount Zion, and uttering those words that have moved the world as they received them from the mouth of the Lord. We recall Him who claimed to be Himself God, whose blessed lessons, and holy life, and atoning death were so closely connected with Jerusalem, and would alone have made it for ever memorable, even if it had been signalized by nothing else. Unless David was illuminated from above to a far greater degree than we have any reason to believe, he could have little thought, when he captured that citadel, what a marvellous chapter in the world's history he was beginning. Century after century, millennium after millennium has passed; and still Zion and Jerusalem draw all eyes and

hearts, and pilgrims from the ends of the earth, as they look even on the ruins of former days, are conscious of a thrill which no other city in all the world can give. Nor is that all. When a name has to be found on earth for the home of the blessed in heaven, it is the new Jerusalem; when the scene of heavenly worship, vocal with the voice of harpers harping with their harps, has to be distinguished, it is said to be Mount Zion. Is not all this a striking testimony that nothing so ennobles either places or men as the gracious fellowship of God? View this distinction of Jerusalem and Mount Zion, if you choose, as the result of mere natural causes. Though the effect must be held far beyond the efficacy of the cause, yet you have this fact: that the places in all the world that to civilized mankind have become far the most glorious are those with which it is believed that God maintained a close and unexampled connection. View it, as it ought to be viewed, as a supernatural result; count the fellowship of God at Jerusalem a real fellowship, and His Spirit a living Spirit; count the presence of Jesus Christ to have been indeed that of God manifest in the flesh; you have now a cause really adequate to the effect, and you have a far more striking proof than before of the dignity and glory which God's presence brings. Would that every one of you might ponder the lesson of Jerusalem and Zion! O ye sons of men, God has drawn nigh to you, and He has drawn nigh to you as a God of salvation. Hear then His message! "For if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we refuse Him that speaketh from heaven."

CHAPTER VII.

THE KINGDOM ESTABLISHED.

2 SAMUEL v. 10—25.

THE events in David's reign that followed the capture of Mount Zion and the appointment of Jerusalem as the capital of the country were all of a prosperous kind. "David," we are told, "waxed greater and greater, for the Lord of hosts was with him." "And David perceived that the Lord had established him to be king over Israel, and that He had exalted his kingdom for His people Israel's sake."

In these words we find two things: a fact and an explanation. The fact is, that now the tide fairly turned in David's history, and that, instead of a sad chronicle of hardship and disappointment, the record of his reign becomes one of unmingled success and prosperity. The fact is far from an unusual one in the history of men's lives. How often, even in the case of men who have become eminent, has the first stage of life been one of disappointment and sorrow, and the last part one of prosperity so great as to exceed the fondest dreams of youth. Effort after effort has been made by a young man to get a footing in the literary world, but his books have proved comparative failures. At last he issues one which catches in a remarkable degree the popular taste, and thereafter fame and

fortune attend him, and lay their richest offerings at his feet. A similar tale is to be told of many an artist and professional man. And even persons of more ordinary gifts, who have found the battle of life awfully difficult in its earlier stages, have gradually, through diligence and perseverance, acquired an excellent position, more than fulfilling every reasonable desire for success. No man is indeed exempt from the risk of failure if he chooses a path of life for which he has no special fitness, or if he encounters a storm of unfavourable contingencies; but it is an encouraging thing for those who begin life under hard conditions, but with a brave heart and a resolute purpose to do their best, that, as a general rule, the sky clears as the day advances, and the troubles and struggles of the morning yield to success and enjoyment later in the day.

But in the present instance we have not merely a statement of the fact that the tide turned in the case of David, giving him prosperity and enlargement in every quarter, but an explanation of the fact—it was due to the gracious presence and favour of God. This by no means implies that his adversities were due to an opposite cause. God had been with him in the wilderness, save when he resorted to deceit and other tricks of carnal policy; but He had been with him to try him and to train him, not to crown him with prosperity. But now, the purpose of the early training being accomplished, God is with him to "grant him all his heart's desire and fulfil all his counsel." If God, indeed, had not been with him, sanctifying his early trials, He would not have been with him in the end, crowning him with loving-kindness and tender mercies. But in the time of their trials, God is with His people

more in secret, hid, at least, from the observation of the world; when the time comes for conspicuous blessing and prosperity, He comes more into view in His own gracious and bountiful character. In the case of David, God was not only with him, but David "perceived" it; he was conscious of the fact. His filial spirit recognized the source of all his prosperity and blessing, as it had done when he was enabled in his boyhood to slay the lion and the bear, and in his youth to triumph over Goliath. Unlike many successful men, who ascribe their success so largely to their personal talents and ways of working, he felt that the great factor in his success was God. If he possessed talents and had used them to advantage, it was God who had given them originally, and it was God who had enabled him to employ them well. But in every man's career, there are many other elements to be considered besides his own abilities. There is what the world calls "luck," that is to say those conditions of success which are quite out of our control; as for instance in business the unexpected rise or fall of markets, the occurrence of favourable openings, the honesty or dishonesty of partners and connections, the stability or the vicissitudes of investments. The difference between the successful man of the world and the successful godly man in these respects is, that the one speaks only of his luck, the other sees the hand of God in ordering all such things for his benefit. This last was David's case. Well did he know that the very best use he could make of his abilities could not ensure success unless God was present to order and direct to a prosperous issue the ten thousand incidental influences that bore on the outcome of his undertakings. And when he saw that these influences were all directed to this end, that

nothing went wrong, that all conspired steadily and harmoniously to the enlargement and establishment of his kingdom, he perceived that the Lord was with him, and was now visibly fulfilling to him that great principle of His government which He had so solemnly declared to Eli, "Them that honour Me, I will honour."

But is this way of claiming to be specially favoured and blessed by God not objectionable? Is it not what the world calls "cant"? Is it not highly offensive in any man to claim to be a favourite of Heaven? Is this not what hypocrites and fanatics are so fond of doing, and is it not a course which every good, humble-minded man will be careful to avoid?

This may be a plausible way of reasoning, but one thing is certain—it has not the support of Scripture. If it be an offence publicly to recognise the special favour and blessing with which it has pleased God to visit us, David himself was the greatest offender in this respect the world has ever known. What is the great burden of his psalms of thanksgiving? Is it not an acknowledgment of the special mercies and favours that God bestowed on him, especially in his times of great necessity? And does not the whole tenor of the Psalms and the whole tenor of Scripture prove that good men are to take especial note of all the mercies they receive from God, and are not to confine them to their own bosom, but to tell of all His gracious acts and bless His name for ever and ever? "They shall abundantly utter the memory of Thy great goodness, and shall sing of Thy righteousness." That God is to be acknowledged in all our ways, that God's mercy in choosing us in Christ Jesus and blessing us with all spiritual blessings in Him is to be especially recognized, and that we are not to shrink from extolling God's

name for conferring on us favours infinitely beyond what belong to the men of the world, are among the plainest lessons of the word of God.

What the world is so ready to believe is, that this cannot be done save in the spirit of the Pharisee who thanked God that he was not as other men. And whenever a worldly man falls foul of one who owns the distinguishing spiritual mercies that God has bestowed on him, it is this accusation he is sure to hurl at his head. But this just shows the recklessness and injustice of the world. Strange indeed if God in His word has imposed on us a duty which cannot be discharged but in company with those who say, "Stand by thyself; come not nigh; I am holier than thou"! The truth is, the world cannot or will not distinguish between the Pharisee, puffed up with the conceit of his goodness, and for this goodness of his deeming himself the favourite of Heaven, and the humble saint, conscious that in him dwelleth no good thing, and filled with adoring wonder at the mercy of God in making of one so unworthy a monument of His grace. The one is as unlike the other as light is to darkness. What good men need to bear in mind is, that when they do make mention of the special goodness of God to them they should be most careful to do so in no boastful mood, but in the spirit of a most real, and not an assumed or formal, humility. And seeing how ready the world is to misunderstand and misrepresent the feeling, and to turn into a reproach what is done as a most sincere act of gratitude to God, it becomes them to be cautious how they introduce such topics among persons who have no sympathy with their view. "Cast not your pearls before swine," said our Lord, "lest they turn again and rend you." "Come near," said the Psalmist,

"and hear, *all ye that fear God*, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul."

Midway between the two statements before us on the greatness and prosperity which God conferred on David, mention is made of his friendly relations with the king of Tyre (ver. 11). The Phœnicians were not included among the seven nations of Palestine whom the Israelites were to extirpate, so that a friendly alliance with them was not forbidden. It appears that Hiram was disposed for such an alliance, and David accepted of his friendly overtures. There is something refreshing in this peaceful episode in a history and in a time when war and violence seem to have been the normal condition of the intercourse of neighbouring nations. Tyre had a great genius for commerce; and the spirit of commerce is alien from the spirit of war. That it is always a nobler spirit cannot be said; for while commerce *ought* to rest on the idea of mutual benefit, and many of its sons honourably fulfil this condition, it often degenerates into the most atrocious selfishness, and heeds not what havoc it may inflict on others provided it derives personal gain from its undertakings. What an untold amount of sin and misery has been wrought by the opium traffic, as well as by the traffic in strong drink, when pressed by cruel avarice on barbarous nations that have so often lost all of humanity they possessed through the fire-water of the *Christian* trader! But we have no reason to believe that there was anything specially hurtful in the traffic which Tyre now began with Israel, although the intercourse of the two countries afterwards led to other results pernicious to the latter—the introduction of Phœnician idolatry and the overthrow of pure worship in the greater part of the tribes of Israel.

Meanwhile what Hiram does is to send to David cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons, by means of whom a more civilized style of dwelling is introduced; and the new city which David has commenced to build, and especially the house which is to be his own, present features of skill and beauty hitherto unknown in Israel. For, amid all his zeal for higher things, the young king of Israel does not disdain to advance his kingdom in material comforts. Of these, as of other things of the kind, he knows well that they are good if a man use them lawfully; and his effort is at once to promote the welfare of the kingdom in the amenities and comforts of life, and to deepen that profound regard for God and that exalted estimate of His favour which will prevent His people from relying for their prosperity on mere outward conditions, and encourage them ever to place their confidence in their heavenly Protector and King.

We pass by, as not requiring more comment than we have already bestowed on a parallel passage (2 Sam. iii. 2-5), the unsavoury statement that "David took to him more concubines and wives" in Jerusalem. With all his light and grace, he had not overcome the prevalent notion that the dignity and resources of a kingdom were to be measured by the number and rank of the king's wives. The moral element involved in the arrangement he does not seem to have at all apprehended; and consequently, amid all the glory and prosperity that God has given him, he thoughtlessly multiplies the evil that was to spread havoc and desolation in his house.

We proceed, therefore, to what occupies the remainder of this chapter—the narrative of his wars with the Philistines. Two campaigns against these inveterate

enemies of Israel are recorded, and the decisive encounter in both cases took place in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem.

The narrative is so brief that we have difficulty in apprehending all the circumstances. The first invasion of the Philistines took place soon after David was anointed king over all Israel. It is not said whether this occurred before David possessed himself of Mount Zion, nor, considering the structure common in Hebrew narrative, does the circumstance that in the history it follows that event prove that it was subsequent to it in the order of time. On the contrary, there is an expression that seems hardly consistent with this idea. We read (ver. 17) that when David heard of the invasion he "went *down* into the hold." Now, this expression could not be used of the stronghold of Zion, for that hill is on the height of the central plateau, and invariably the Scriptures speak of "going up to Zion." If he had possession of Mount Zion, he would surely have gone to it when the Philistines took possession of the plain of Rephaim. The hold to which he went down must have been in a lower position; indeed, "the hold" is the expression used of the place or places of protection to which David resorted when he was pursued by Saul (see 1 Sam. xxii. 4). Further, when we turn to the twenty-third chapter of this book, which records some memorable incidents of the war with the Philistines, we find (vers. 13, 14) that when the Philistines pitched in the valley of Rephaim David was in a hold near the cave of Adullam. The valley of Rephaim, or "the giants," is an extensive plain to the south-west of Jerusalem, forming a great natural entrance to the city. When we duly consider the import of these facts, we see that the campaign was very serious, and David's

difficulties very great. The Philistines were encamped in force on the summit of the plateau near the natural metropolis of the country. David was encamped in a hold in the low country in the south-west, making use of that very cave of Adullam where he had taken refuge in his conflicts with Saul. This was far from a hopeful state of matters. To the eye of man, his position may have appeared very desperate. Such an emergency was a fit time for a solemn application to God for direction. "David inquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines? Wilt Thou deliver them into mine hand? And the Lord said unto David, Go up, for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand." Up, accordingly, David went, attacked the Philistines and smote them at a place called Baal-perazim, somewhere most likely between Adullam and Jerusalem. The expression "The Lord hath broken forth on mine enemies before me, as the breach of waters," seems to imply that He broke the Philistine host into two, like flooded water breaking an embankment, preventing them from uniting and rallying, and sending them in two detachments into flight and confusion. Considering the superior position of the Philistines, and the great advantage they seem to have had over David in numbers also, this was a signal victory, even though it did not reduce the foe to helplessness.

For when the Philistines had got time to recover, they again came up, pitched again in the plain of Rephaim, and appeared to render unavailing the signal achievement of David at Baal-perazim. Again David inquired what he should do. The reply was somewhat different from before. David was not to go straight up to face the enemy, as he had done before. He was to "fetch a compass behind them," that is, as we under-

stand it, to make a circuit, so as to get in the enemy's rear over against a grove of mulberry trees. That tree has not yet disappeared from the neighbourhood of Jerusalem; a mulberry tree still marks the spot in the valley of Jehoshaphat where, according to tradition, Isaiah was sawn asunder (Stanley's "Sinai and Palestine"). When he should hear "the sound of a going" (Revised Version, "the sound of a march") in the tops of the mulberry trees, then he was to bestir himself. It is difficult to conceive any natural cause that should give rise to a sound like that of a march "in the tops of the mulberry trees;" but if not a natural, it must have been a supernatural indication of some sound that would alarm the Philistines and make the moment favourable for an attack. It is probable that the presence of David and his troop in the rear of the Philistines was not suspected, the mulberry trees forming a screen between them. When David got his opportunity, he availed himself of it to great advantage; he inflicted a thorough defeat on the Philistines, and smiting them from Geba to Gazer, he appears to have all but annihilated their force. In this way, he gave the *coup de grâce* to his former allies.

We have said that it appears to have been during these campaigns against the Philistines that the incidents took place which are recorded fully in the twenty-third chapter of this book. It does not seem possible that these incidents occurred at or about the time when David was flying from Saul, at which time the cave of Adullam was one of his resorts. Neither is it likely that they occurred during the early years of David's reign, while he was yet at strife with the house of Saul. At least, it is more natural to refer them to the time when the Philistines, having heard that David had

been anointed king over Israel, came up to seek David, although we do not consider it impossible that they occurred in the earlier period of his reign. The record shows how wonderfully the spirit of David had passed into his men, and what splendid deeds of courage were performed by them, often in the face of tremendous odds. We get a fine glimpse here of one of the great sources of David's popularity—his extraordinary *pluck* as we now call it, and readiness for the most daring adventures, often crowned with all but miraculous success. In all ages, men of this type have been marvellous favourites with their comrades. The annals of the British army, and still more the British navy, contain many such records. And even when we go down to pirates and freebooters, we find the odium of their mode of life in many cases remarkably softened by the splendour of their valour, by their running unheard-of risks, and sometimes by sheer daring and bravery obtaining signal advantages over the greatest odds. The achievements of David's "three mighties," as well as of his "thirty," formed a splendid instance of this kind of warfare. All that we know of them is comprised within a few lines, but when we call to mind the enthusiasm that used to be awakened all over our own country by the achievements of Nelson and his officers, or more recently by General Gordon, of China and Egypt, we can easily understand the thrilling effect which these wonderful tales of valour would have throughout all the tribes of Israel.

The personal affection for David and his heroes which would thus be formed must have been very warm, nay, even enthusiastic. In the case of David, whatever may have been true of the others, all the influence thus acquired was employed for the

welfare of the nation and the glory of God. The supreme desire of his heart was that the people might give all the glory to Jehovah, and derive from these brilliant successes fresh assurances how faithful God was to His promises to Israel. Alike as a man of piety and a man of patriotism, he made this his aim. Knowing as he did what was due to God, and animated by a profound desire to render to God His due, he would have been horrified had he intercepted in his own person aught of the honour and glory which were His. But for the people's sake also, as a man of patriotism, his desire was equally strong that God should have all the glory. What were military successes however brilliant to the nation, or a reputation however eminent, compared to their enjoying the favour and friendship of God? Success—how ephemeral it was; reputation—as transient as the glow of a cloud beside the setting sun; but God's favour and gracious presence with the nation was a perpetual treasure, enlivening, healing, strengthening, guiding for evermore. "Happy is that people that is in such a case; yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ARK BROUGHT UP TO JERUSALEM.

2 SAMUEL vi.

THE first care of David when settled on the throne had been to obtain possession of the stronghold of Zion, on which and on the city which was to surround it he fixed as the capital of the kingdom and the dwelling-place of the God of Israel. This being done, he next set about bringing up the ark of the testimony from Kirjath-jearim, where it had been left after being restored by the Philistines in the early days of Samuel. David's first attempt to place the ark on Mount Zion failed through want of due reverence on the part of those who were transporting it; but after an interval of three months the attempt was renewed, and the sacred symbol was duly installed on Mount Zion, in the midst of the tabernacle prepared by David for its reception.

In bringing up the ark to Jerusalem, the king showed a commendable desire to interest the whole nation, as far as possible, in the solemn service. He gathered together the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand, and went with them to bring up the ark from Baale of Judah, which must be another name for Kirjath-jearim, distant from Jerusalem about ten miles. The people, numerous as they were, grudged neither the time, the trouble, nor the expense. A handful might have sufficed

for all the actual labour that was required; but thousands of the chief people were summoned to be present, and that on the principle both of rendering due honour to God, and of conferring a benefit on the people. It is not a handful of professional men only that should be called to take a part in the service of religion; Christian people generally should have an interest in the ark of God; and other things being equal, that Church which interests the greatest number of people and attracts them to active work will not only do most for advancing God's kingdom, but will enjoy most of inward life and prosperity.

The joyful spirit in which this service was performed by David and his people is another interesting feature of the transaction. Evidently it was not looked on as a toilsome service, but as a blessed festival, adapted to cheer the heart and raise the spirits. What was the precise nature of the service? It was to bring into the heart of the nation, into the new capital of the kingdom, the ark of the covenant, that piece of sacred furniture which had been constructed nearly five hundred years before in the wilderness of Sinai, the memorial of God's holy covenant with the people, and the symbol of His gracious presence among them. In spirit it was bringing God into the very midst of the nation, and on the choicest and most prominent pedestal the country now supplied setting up a constant memento of the presence of the Holy One. Rightly understood, the service could bring joy only to spiritual hearts; it could give pleasure to none who had reason to dread the presence of God. To those who knew Him as their reconciled Father and the covenant God of the nation, it was most attractive. It was as if the sun were again shining on them after a long eclipse, or as if the father of a

loved and loving family had returned after a weary absence. God enthroned on Zion, God in the midst of Jerusalem—what happier or more thrilling thought was it possible to cherish? God, the sun and shield of the nation, occupying for His residence the one fitting place in all the land, and sending over Jerusalem and over all the country emanations of love and grace, full of blessing for all that feared His name! The happiness with which this service was entered on by David and his people is surely the type of the spirit in which all service to God should be rendered by those whose sins He has blotted out, and on whom He has bestowed the privileges of His children.

But the best of services may be gone about in a faulty way. There may be some criminal neglect of God's will that, like the dead fly in the apothecary's pot of ointment, causes the perfume to send forth a stinking savour. And so it was on this occasion. God had expressly directed that when the ark was moved from place to place it should be borne on poles on the shoulders of the Levites, and never carried in a cart, like a common piece of furniture. But in the removal of the ark from Kirjath-jearim, this direction was entirely overlooked. Instead of following the directions given to Moses, the example of the Philistines was copied when they sent the ark back to Bethshemesh. The Philistines had placed it in a new cart, and the men of Israel now did the same. What induced them to follow the example of the Philistines rather than the directions of Moses, we do not know, and can hardly conjecture. It does not appear to have been a mere oversight. It had something of a deliberate plan about it, as if the law given in the wilderness were now obsolete, and in so small a

matter any method might be chosen that the people liked. It was substituting a heathen example for a Divine rule in the worship of God. We cannot suppose that David was guilty of deliberately setting aside the authority of God. On his part, it may have been an error of inadvertence. But that somewhere there was a serious offence is evident from the punishment with which it was visited (1 Chron. xv. 13). The jagged bridlepaths of those parts are not at all adapted for wheeled conveyances, and when the oxen stumbled, and the ark was shaken, Uzzah, who was driving the cart, put forth his hand to steady it. "The anger of God," we are told, "was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God." His effort to steady the ark must have been made in a presumptuous way, without reverence for the sacred vessel. Only a Levite was authorized to touch it, and Uzzah was apparently a man of Judah. The punishment may seem to us hard for an offence which was ceremonial rather than moral; but in that economy, moral truth was taught through ceremonial observances, and neglect of the one was treated as involving neglect of the other. The punishment was like the punishment of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, for offering strange fire in their censers. It may be that both in their case, and in the case of Uzzah, there were unrecorded circumstances, unknown to us, making it clear that the ceremonial offence was not a mere accident, but that it was associated with evil personal qualities well fitted to provoke the judgment of God. The great lesson for all time is to beware of following our own devices in the worship of God when we have clear instructions in His word how we are to worship Him.

This lamentable event put a sudden end to the joyful service. It was like the bursting of a thunderstorm on an excursion party that rapidly sends every one to flight. And it is doubtful whether the spirit shown by David was altogether right. He was displeased "because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah, and he called the name of the place Perez-uzzah to this day. And David was afraid of the Lord that day and said, How shall the ark of the Lord come to me? So David would not remove the ark of the Lord into the city of David; but David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite." The narrative reads as if David resented the judgment which God had inflicted, and in a somewhat petulant spirit abandoned the enterprise because he found God too hard to please. That some such feeling should have fluttered about his heart was not to be wondered at; but surely it was a feeling to which he ought not to have given entertainment, as it certainly was one on which he ought not to have acted. If God was offended, David surely knew that He must have had good ground for being so. It became him and the people, therefore, to accept God's judgment, humble themselves before Him, and seek forgiveness for the negligent manner in which they had addressed themselves to this very solemn service. Instead of this David throws up the matter in a fit of sullen temper, as if it were impossible to please God in it, and the enterprise must therefore be abandoned. He leaves the ark in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite, returning to Jerusalem crestfallen and displeased, altogether in a spirit most opposite to that in which he had set out.

It may happen to you that some Christian undertaking on which you have entered with great zeal and

ardour, and without any surmise that you are not doing right, is not blessed, but meets with some rough shock, that places you in a very painful position. In the most disinterested spirit, you have tried perhaps to set up in some neglected district a school or a mission, and you expect all encouragement and approbation from those who are most interested in the welfare of the district. Instead of receiving approval, you find that you are regarded as an enemy and an intruder. You are attacked with unexampled rudeness, sinister aims are laid to your charge, and the purpose of your undertaking is declared to be to hurt and discourage those whom you were bound to aid. The shock is so violent and so rude that for a time you cannot understand it. On the part of man it admits of no reasonable justification whatever. But when you go into your closet, and think of the matter as permitted by God, you wonder still more why God should thwart you in your endeavour to do good. Rebellious feelings hover about your heart that if God is to treat you in this way, it were better to abandon His service altogether. But surely no such feeling is ever to find a settled place in your heart. You may be sure that the rebuff which God has permitted you to encounter is meant as a trial of your faith and humility; and if you wait on God for further light and humbly ask a true view of God's will; if, above all, you beware of retiring in sullen silence from God's active service, good may come out of the apparent evil, and you may yet find cause to bless God even for the shock that made you so uncomfortable at the time.

The Lord does not forsake His people, nor leave them for ever under a cloud. It was not long before the downcast heart of David was reassured. When

the ark had been left at the house of Obed-edom, Obed-edom was not afraid to take it in. Its presence in other places had hitherto been the signal for disaster and death. Among the Philistines, in city after city, at Bethshemesh, and now at Perez-uzzah, it had spread death on every side. Obed-edom was no sufferer. Probably he was a God-fearing man, conscious of no purpose but that of honouring God. A manifest blessing rested on his house. "The God of heaven," says Bishop Hall, "pays liberally for His lodging." It is not so much God's ark in our time and country that needs a lodging, but God's servants, God's poor, sometimes persecuted fugitives flying from an oppressor, very often pious men in oreign countries labouring under infinite discouragements to serve God. The Obed-edom who takes them in will not suffer. Even should he be put to loss or inconvenience, the day of recompense draweth nigh. "I was a stranger, and ye took Me in."

Again, then, King David, encouraged by the experience of Obed-edom, goes forth in royal state to bring up the ark to Jerusalem. The error that had proved so fatal was now rectified. "David said, None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites, for them hath the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God and to minister unto Him for ever" (1 Chron. xv. 2). In token of his humility and his conviction that every service that man renders to God is tainted and needs forgiveness, oxen and fatlings were sacrificed ere the bearers of the ark had well begun to move. The spirit of enthusiastic joy again swayed the multitude, brightened probably by the assurance that no judgment need now be dreaded, but that they might confidently look for the smile of an approving God. The feelings

of the king himself were wonderfully wrought up, and he gave free expression to the joy of his heart. There are occasions of great rejoicing when all ceremony is forgotten, and no forms or appearances are suffered to stem the tide of enthusiasm as it gushes right from the heart. It was an occasion of this kind to David. The check he had sustained three months before had only dammed up his feelings, and they rolled out now with all the greater volume. His soul was stirred by the thought that the symbol of Godhead was now to be placed in his own city, close to his own dwelling; that it was to find an abiding place of rest in the heart of the kingdom, on the heights where Melchizedek had reigned, close to where he had blessed Abraham, and which God had destined as His own dwelling from the foundations of the world. Glorious memories of the past, mingling with bright anticipations of the future, recollections of the grace revealed to the fathers, and visions of the same grace streaming forth to distant ages, as generation after generation of the faithful came up here to attend the holy festivals, might well excite that tumult of emotion in David's breast before which the ordinary restraints of royalty were utterly flung aside. He sacrificed, he played, he sang, he leapt and danced before the Lord, with all his might; he made a display of enthusiasm which the cold-hearted Michal, as she could not understand it nor sympathise with it, had the folly to despise and the cruelty to ridicule. The ordinary temper of the sexes was reversed—the man was enthusiastic; the woman was cold. Little did she know of the springs of true enthusiasm in the service of God! To her faithless eye, the ark was little more than a chest of gold, and where it was kept was of little con-

sequence; her carnal heart could not appreciate the glory that excelleth; her blind eye could see none of the visions that had overpowered the soul of her husband.

A few other circumstances are briefly noticed in connection with the close of the service, when the ark had been solemnly enshrined within the tabernacle that David had reared for it on Mount Zion.

The first is that "David offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings before the Lord." The burnt-offering was a fresh memorial of sin, and therefore a fresh confession that even in connection with that very holy service there were sins to be confessed, atoned for, and forgiven. For there is this great difference between the service of the formalist and the service of the earnest worshipper: that while the one can see nothing faulty in his performance, the other sees a multitude of imperfections in his. Clearer light and a clearer eye, even the light thrown by the glory of God's purity on the best works of man, reveal a host of blemishes, unseen in ordinary light and by the carnal eye. Our very prayers need to be purged, our tears to be wept over, our repentances repented of. Little could the best services ever done by him avail the spiritual worshipper if it were not for the High-priest over the house of God who ever liveth to make intercession for him.

Again, we find David after the offering of the burnt-offerings and the peace-offerings "blessing the people in the name of the Lord of hosts." This was something more than merely expressing a wish or offering a prayer for their welfare. It was like the benediction with which we close our public services. The benediction is more than a prayer. The servant of the

Lord appears in the attitude of dropping on the heads of the people the blessing which he invokes. Not that he or any man can convey heavenly blessings to a people that do not by faith appropriate them and rejoice in them. But the act of benediction implies this: These blessings are yours if you will only have them. They are provided, they are made over to you, if you will only accept them. The last act of public worship is a great encouragement to faith. When the peace of God that passeth all understanding, or the blessing of God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, or the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost are invoked over your heads, it is to assure you that if you will but accept of them through Jesus Christ, these great blessings are actually yours. True, there is no part of our service more frequently spoiled by formality; but there is none richer with true blessing to faith. So when David blessed the people, it was an assurance to them that God's blessing was within their reach; it was theirs if they would only take it. How strange that any hearts should be callous under such an announcement; that any should fail to leap to it, as it were, and rejoice in it, as glad tidings of great joy!

The third thing David did was to deal to every one of Israel, both man and woman, a loaf of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine. It was a characteristic act, worthy of a bountiful and generous nature like David's. It may be that associating bodily gratifications with Divine service is liable to abuse, that the taste which it gratifies is not a high one, and that it tempts some men to attend religious services for the same reason as some followed Jesus—for the loaves and fishes. Yet Jesus did not abstain on some rare

occasions from feeding the multitude, though the act was liable to abuse. The example both of David and of Jesus may show us that though not habitually, yet occasionally, it is both right and fitting that religious service should be associated with a simple repast. There is nothing in Scripture to warrant the practice, adopted in some missions in very poor districts, of feeding the people habitually when they come up for religious service, and there is much in the argument that such a practice degrades religion and obscures the glory of the blessings which Divine service is designed to bring to the poor. But occasionally the rigid rule may be somewhat relaxed, and thus a sort of symbolical proof afforded that godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

The last thing recorded of David is, that he returned to bless his house. The cares of the State and the public duties of the day were not allowed to interfere with his domestic duty. Whatever may have been his ordinary practice, on this occasion at least he was specially concerned for his household, and desirous that in a special sense they should share the blessing. It is plain from this that, amid all the imperfections of his motley household, he could not allow his children to grow up ignorant of God, thus dealing a rebuke to all who, outdoing the very heathen in heathenism, have houses without an altar and without a God. It is painful to find that the spirit of the king was not shared by every member of his family. It was when he was returning to this duty that Michal met him and addressed to him these insulting words: "How glorious was the king of Israel to-day, who uncovered himself to-day in the eyes of the handmaids of his

servants, as one of the vain fellows shamefully uncovers himself." On the mind of David himself, this ebullition had no effect but to confirm him in his feeling, and reiterate his conviction that his enthusiasm reflected on him not shame but glory. But a woman of Michal's character could not but act like an icicle on the spiritual life of the household. She belonged to a class that cannot tolerate enthusiasm in religion. In any other cause, enthusiasm may be excused, perhaps extolled and admired: in the painter, the musician, the traveller, even the child of pleasure; the only persons whose enthusiasm is unbearable are those who are enthusiastic in their regard for their Saviour, and in the answer they give to the question, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" There are, doubtless, times to be calm, and times to be enthusiastic; but can it be right to give all our coldness to Christ and all our enthusiasm to the world?

CHAPTER IX.

PROPOSAL TO BUILD A TEMPLE.

2 SAMUEL vii.

THE spirit of David was essentially active and fond of work. He was one of those who are ever pressing on, not content to keep things as they are, moving personally towards improvement, and urging others to do the same. Even in Eastern countries, with their proverbial stillness and conservatism, such men are sometimes found, but they are far more common elsewhere. Great undertakings do not frighten them; they have spirit enough for a lifetime of effort, they never seem weary of pushing on. When they look on the disorders of the world they are not content with the languid utterance, "Something must be done;" they consider what it is possible for them to do, and gird themselves to the doing of it.

For some time David seems to have found ample scope for his active energies in subduing the Philistines and other hostile tribes that were yet mingled with the Israelites, and that had long given them much annoyance. His friendship with Hiram of Tyre probably gave a new impulse to his mind, and led him to project many improvements in Jerusalem and elsewhere. When all his enemies were quieted, and he sat in his house, he began to consider to what work of internal

improvement he would now give his attention. Having recently removed the Ark, and placed it in a tabernacle on Mount Zion, constructed probably in accordance with the instructions given to Moses in the wilderness, he did not at first contemplate the erection of any other kind of building for the service of God. It was while he sat in his new and elegant house that the idea came into his mind that it was not seemly that he should be lodged in so substantial a home, while the Ark of God dwelt between curtains. Curtains might have been suitable, nay, necessary, in the wilderness, where the Ark had constantly to be moved about; and even in the land of Israel, while the nation was comparatively unsettled, curtains might still have been best; but now that a permanent resting-place had been found for the Ark, was it right that there should be such a contrast between the dwelling-place of David and the dwelling-place of God? It was the very argument that was afterwards used by Haggai and Zechariah after the return from captivity, to rouse the languid zeal of their countrymen for the re-erection of the house of God. "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses and this house lie waste?"

A generous heart, even though it be a godless one, is uncomfortable when surrounded by elegance and luxury, while starvation and misery prevail in its neighbourhood. We see in our day the working of this feeling in those cases, unhappily too few, where men and women born to gold and grandeur feel wretched unless they are doing something to equalise the conditions of life by helping those who are born to rags and wretchedness. To the feelings of the godly a disreputable place of worship, contrasting meanly with the taste and elegance of the hall, or even the

villa, is a pain and a reproach. There is not much need at the present day for urging the unseemliness of such a contrast, for the tendency of our time is toward handsome church buildings, and in many cases towards extravagance in the way of embellishment. What we have more need to look at is the disproportion of the sums paid by rich men, and even by men who can hardly be called rich, in gratifying their own tastes and in extending the kingdom of Christ. We are far from blaming those who, having great wealth, spend large sums from year to year on yachts, on equipages, on picture galleries, on jewellery and costly furnishings. Wealth which remunerates honest and wholesome labour is not all selfishly thrown away. But it is somewhat strange that we hear so seldom of rich Christian men devoting their superfluous wealth to maintaining a mission station with a whole staff of labourers, or to the rearing of colleges, or hospitals, or Christian institutions, which might provide on a large scale for Christian activity in ways that might be wonderfully useful. It is in this direction that there is most need to press the example of David. When shall this new enlargement of Christian activity take place? Or when shall men learn that the pleasure of spreading the blessings of the Gospel by the equipment and maintenance of a foreign missionary or mission station far exceeds anything to be derived from refinements and luxuries of which they themselves are the object and the centre?

When the thought of building a temple occurred to David, he conferred on the subject with the prophet Nathan. The Scripture narrative is so brief that it gives us no information about Nathan, except in connection with two or three events in which he had a

share. Apparently he was a prophet of Jerusalem, on intimate terms with David, and perhaps attached to his court. When first consulted on the subject by the king, he gave him a most encouraging answer, but without having taken any special steps to ascertain the mind of God. He presumed that as the undertaking was itself so good, and as David generally was so manifestly under Divine guidance, nothing was to be said but that he should go on. "Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in thine heart, for the Lord is with thee." That same night, however, a message came to Nathan that gave a new complexion to the proposal. He was instructed to remind David, first, that God had never complained of His tabernacle-dwelling from the day when He brought up the children of Israel to that hour, and had never given a hint that He desired a house of cedar. Further, he was commissioned to convey to David the assurance of God's continued interest and favour towards him—of that interest which began by taking him from the sheepfold to make him king over Israel, and which had been shown continuously in the success which had been given him in all his enterprises, and the great name he had acquired, entitling him to rank with the great men of the earth. Towards the nation of Israel, too, God was actuated by the same feeling of affectionate interest; they would be planted, set firm in a place of their own, delivered from the thraldom of enemies, and allowed to prosper and expand in peace and comfort. Still further—and this was a very special blessing—Nathan was to inform David that, unlike Saul, he was not to be the only one of his race to occupy the throne; his son would reign after he was gathered to his fathers, the kingdom would be established in his hands, and the throne of his

kingdom would be established for ever. To this favoured son of his would be entrusted the honour of building the temple, God would be his Father, and he would be God's son. If he should fall into sin, he would be chastised for his sin, but not destroyed. The Divine mercy would not depart from him as it had departed from Saul. The kernel of the message was in these gracious concluding words—"Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee; thy throne shall be established for ever."

Here, certainly, was a very remarkable message, containing both elements of refusal and elements of encouragement. The proposal which David had made to build a temple was declined. The time for a change, though drawing near, had not yet arrived. The curtain-canopied tabernacle had been designed by God to wean His people from those sensuous ideas of worship to which the magnificent temples of Egypt had accustomed them, and to give them the true idea of a spiritual service, though not without the visible emblem of a present God. The time had not yet arrived for changing this simple arrangement. God could impart His blessing in the humble tent as well as in the stately temple. As long as it was God's pleasure to dwell in the tabernacle, so long might David expect that His grace would be imparted there. So we may say, that so long as it is manifestly God's pleasure that a body of His worshippers shall occupy a humble tabernacle, so long may they expect that He will shine forth there, imparting that fulness of grace and blessing which is the true and only glory of any place of worship.

But the message through Nathan contained also elements of encouragement, chiefly with reference to David's offspring, and to the stability and permanence

of his throne. To appreciate the value of this promise for the future, we must bear in mind the great insecurity of new dynasties in Eastern countries, and the fearful tragedies that were often perpetrated to get rid of the old king's family, and prepare the way for some ambitious and unscrupulous usurper.

We hardly need to recall the tragic end of Saul, the base murder of Ishbosheth, or the painful deaths of Asahel and Abner. We have but to think of what happened in the sister kingdom of the ten tribes, from the death of the son of its first king, Jeroboam, on to its final extinction. What an awful record the history of that kingdom presents of conspiracies, murders, and massacres! How miserable a distinction it was to be of the seed royal in those days! It only made one the more conspicuous a mark for the poisoned cup or the assassin's dagger. It associated with the highest families of the realm horrors and butcheries of which the poorest had no cause even to dream. Any one who had been raised to a throne could not but sicken at the thought of the atrocities which his very elevation might one day bring upon his children. A new king could hardly enjoy his dignity but by steeling his heart against every feeling of parental love.

And, moreover, these constant changes of the royal family were very hurtful to the kingdom at large. They divided it into sections that raged against each other with terrible fury. For of all wars civil wars are the worst for the fierceness of the passions they evoke, and the horrors which they inflict. Scotland and England too have had too much experience of these conflicts in other days. Many generations have elapsed since they were ended, but we have many memorials still of the desolation which they spread, while our progress and

prosperity, ever since they passed away, show us clearly of what a multitude of mercies they robbed the land.

To David, therefore, it was an unspeakable comfort to be assured that his dynasty would be a stable dynasty; that his son would reign after him; that a succession of princes would follow with unquestioned right to the throne; and that if his son, or his son's son, should commit sins deserving of chastisement, that chastisement would not be withheld, but it would not be fatal, it would bring the needed correction, and thus the throne would be secure for ever. A father naturally desires peace and prosperity for his children, and if he extends his view down the generations, the desire is strong that it may be well with them and with their seed for ever. But no father, in ordinary circumstances, can flatter himself that his posterity shall escape their share of the current troubles and calamities of life. David, but for this assurance, must have looked forward to his posterity encountering their share of those nameless horrors to which royal children were often born. It was an unspeakable privilege to learn, as he did now, that his dynasty would be alike permanent and secure; that, as a rule, his children would not be exposed to the atrocities of Oriental successions; that they would be under the special care and protection of God; that their faults would be corrected without their being destroyed; and that this state of blessing would continue for ages and ages to come.

The emotions roused in David by this communication were alike delightful and exuberant. He takes no notice of the disappointment—of his not being permitted to build the temple. Any regret that this might occasion is swallowed up by his delight in the store

of blessing actually promised. And here we may see a remarkable instance of God's way of dealing with His people's prayers. Virtually, if not formally, David had asked of God to permit him to build a temple to His name. That petition, bearing though it did very directly on God's glory, is not vouchsafed. God does not accord that privilege to David. But in refusing him that request, He makes over to him mercies of far higher reach and importance. He refuses his immediate request only to grant to him far above all that he was able to ask or think. And how often does God do so! How often, when His people are worrying and perplexing themselves about their prayers not being answered, is God answering them in a far richer way! Glimpses of this we see occasionally, but the full revelation of it remains for the future. You pray to the degree of agony for the preservation of a beloved life; it is not granted; God appears deaf to your cry; a year or two after, things happen that would have broken your friend's heart or driven reason from its throne; you understand now why God did not fulfil your petition. Oh for the spirit of trust that shall never charge God foolishly! Oh for the faith that does not make haste, but waits patiently for the Lord,—waits for the explanation that shall come in the end, at the revelation of Jesus Christ!

It is a striking scene that is presented to us when "David went in, and sat before the Lord." It is the only instance in Scripture in which any one is said to have taken the attitude of sitting while pouring his heart out to God. Yet the nature of the communion was in keeping with the attitude. David was like a child sitting down beside his father, to think over some wonderfully kind expression of his intentions to

him, and pour out his full heart into his ear. We may observe in the address of David how pervaded it is by the tone of wonder. This, indeed, is its great characteristic. He expresses wonder at the past, at God's selecting one obscure in family and obscure in person; he wonders at the present: How is it Thou hast brought me thus far? and still more he wonders at the future, the provision made for the stability of his house in all time coming. "And is this the manner of man, O Lord God?"* All true religious feeling is pervaded by an element of wonder; it is this element that warms and elevates it. In David's case it kindles intense adoration and gratitude, with reference both to God's dealings with himself and His dealings with Israel. "What one nation in the earth is like Thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to Himself, and to make Him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for Thy land, before Thy people, which Thou redeemedst to Thee from Egypt, from the nations and their gods?" This wonder at past goodness, moreover, begets great confidence for the future. And David warmly and gratefully expresses this confidence, and looks forward with exulting feelings to the blessings reserved for him and his house. And finally he falls into the attitude of supplication, and prays that it may all come to pass. Not that he doubts God's word; the tone of the whole prayer is the tone of gratitude for the past and confidence in the future.

* The expression is very obscure, whether we take the affirmative form of the Revised Version or the interrogative form of the Authorised Version. "And this, too, after the manner of men, O Lord God!" (R.V.) We must choose between these opposite meanings. We prefer the interrogative form of the A.V. David's wonder being the more excited that God's ways were here so much above man's.

But he feels it right to take up the attitude of a suppliant, to show, as we believe, that it must all come of God's free and infinite mercy; that not one of all the good things which God had promised could be claimed as a right, for the least and the greatest were due alike to the rich grace of a sovereign God. "Therefore now let it please Thee to bless the house of Thy servant, that it may continue for ever before Thee; for Thou, O Lord God, hast spoken it, and with Thy blessing let the house of Thy servant be blessed for ever." Appropriate ending for a remarkable prayer! appropriate, too, not for David only, but for every Christian praying for his country, and for every Christian father praying for his family! "With Thy blessing," bestowed alike in mercy and in chastisement, in what Thou givest and in what Thou withholdest, but making all things work together for eternal good—"With Thy blessing let the house of Thy servant be blessed for ever."

We seem to see in this prayer the very best of David—much intensity of feeling, great humility, wondering gratitude, holy intimacy and trust, and supreme satisfaction in the blessing of God. We see him walking in the very light of God's countenance, and supremely happy. We see Jacob's ladder between earth and heaven, and the angels of God ascending and descending on it. Moreover, we see the infinite privilege which is involved in having God for our Father, and in being able to realise that He is full of most fatherly feelings to us. The joy of David in this act of fellowship with God was the purest of which human beings are capable. It was indeed a joy unspeakable and full of glory. Oh that men would but acquaint themselves with God and be at peace! Let it be our

aim to cherish as warm sentiments of trust in God, and to look forward to the future with equal satisfaction and delight.

A very important question arises in connection with this chapter, to which we have not yet adverted, but which we cannot pass by. In that promise of God respecting the stability of David's throne and the perpetual duration of his dynasty, was there any reference to the Messiah, any reference to the spiritual kingdom of which alone it could be said with truth that it was to last for ever? The answer to this question is very plain, because some of the words addressed by God to David are quoted in the New Testament as having a Messianic reference. "To which of the angels said He at any time, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to Me a son?" (Heb. i. 5). If we consider, too, how David's dynasty really came to an end as a reigning family some five hundred years after, we see that the language addressed to him was not exhausted by the fortunes of his family. In the Divine mind the prophecy reached forward to the time of Christ, and only in Christ was it fully verified. And it seems plain from some words of St. Peter on the day of Pentecost that David understood this. He knew that "God had sworn to him that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on His throne" (Acts ii. 30). From the very exalted emotions which the promise raised in his breast, and the enthusiasm with which he poured forth his thanksgivings for it, we infer that David saw in it far more than a promise that for generations to come his house would enjoy a royal dignity. He must have concluded that the great hope of Israel was to be fulfilled in connection with his race. God's words implied, that it was in His

line the promise to Abraham was to be fulfilled—"In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." He saw Christ's day afar off and was glad. To us who look back on that day the reasons for gladness and gratitude are far stronger than they were even to him. Then let us prize the glorious fact that the Son of David has come, even the Son of God, who hath given us understanding that we may know Him that is true. And while we prize the truth, let us embrace the privilege; let us become one with Him in whom we too become sons of God, and with whom we may cherish the hope of reigning for ever as kings and priests, when He comes to gather His redeemed that they may sit with Him on the throne of His glory.

CHAPTER X.

FOREIGN WARS.

2 Samuel viii. 1—14.

THE transitions of the Bible, like those of actual life, are often singularly abrupt; that which now hurries us from the scene of elevated communion with God to the confused noise and deadly struggles of the battle-field is peculiarly startling. We are called to contemplate David in a remarkable light, as a professional warrior, a man of the sword, a man of blood; wielding the weapons of destruction with all the decision and effect of the most daring commanders. That the sweet singer of Israel, from whose tender heart those blessed words poured out to which the troubled soul turns for composure and peace, should have been so familiar with the horrors of the battle-field, is indeed a surprise. We can only say that he was led to regard all this rough work as indispensable to the very existence of his kingdom, and to the fulfilment of the great ends for which Israel had been called. Painful and miserable though it was in itself, it was necessary for the accomplishment of greater good. The bloodthirsty spirit of these hostile nations would have swallowed up the kingdom of Israel, and left no trace of it remaining. The promise to Abraham, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed," would

have ceased to have any basis for its fulfilment. Painful though it was to deal death and destruction on every side, it would have been worse to see the nation of Israel destroyed, and the foundation of the world's greatest blessings swept for ever away.

The "rest from all his enemies round about," referred to in the first verse of the seventh chapter, seems to refer to the nearer enemies of the kingdom, while the wars mentioned in the present chapter were mostly with enemies more remote. The most important of the wars now to be considered was directed against the occupants of that large territory lying between Palestine and the Euphrates which God had promised to Abraham, although no command had been given to dispossess the inhabitants, and therefore it could be held only in tributary subjection. In some respects, David was the successor of Joshua as well as of Moses. He had to continue Joshua's work of conquest, as well as Moses' work of political arrangement and administration. The nations against whom he had now to go forth were most of them warlike and powerful; some of them were banded together in leagues against him, rendering his enterprise very perilous, and such as could have been undertaken by no one who had not an immovable trust in God. The twentieth Psalm seems to express the feelings with which the godly part of the nation would regard him as he went forth to these distant and perilous enterprises:—

> The Lord answer thee in the day of trouble;
> The name of the God of Jacob set thee up on high;
> Send thee help from the sanctuary,
> And strengthen thee out of Zion;
> Remember all thy offerings,
> And accept thy burnt-sacrifice; [Selah
> Grant thee thy heart's desire,

And fulfil all thy counsel.
We will triumph in thy salvation,
And in the name of our God we will set up our banners:
The Lord fulfil all thy petitions.
Now know I that the Lord saveth His anointed;
He will answer him from His holy heaven
With the saving strength of His right hand.
Some trust in chariots, and some in horses,
But we will make mention of the name of the Lord our God.
They are bowed down and fallen;
But we are risen, and stand upright.
Save, Lord;
Let the King answer us when we call.

It is an instructive fact that the history of these wars is given so shortly. A single verse is all that is given to most of the campaigns. This brevity shows very clearly that another spirit than that which moulded ordinary histories guided the composition of this book. It would be beyond human nature to resist the temptation to describe great battles, the story of which is usually read with such breathless interest, and which gratify the pride of the people and reflect glory on the nation. It is not the object of Divine revelation to furnish either brief annals or full details of wars and other national events, except in so far as they have a spiritual bearing—a bearing on the relation between God and the people. From first to last the purpose of the Bible is simply to unfold the dispensation of grace,—God's progress in revelation of His method of making an end of sin, and bringing in everlasting righteousness.

We shall briefly notice what is said regarding the different undertakings.

1. The first campaign was against the Philistines. Not even their disastrous discomfiture near the plain of Rephaim had taught submission to that restless

people. On this occasion David carried the war into their own country, and took some of their towns, establishing garrisons there, as the Philistines had done formerly in the land of Israel. There is some obscurity in the words which describe one of his conquests. According to the Authorised Version, "He took Metheg-ammah out of the hand of the Philistines." The Revised Version renders, "He took the bridle of the mother city out of the hand of the Philistines." The parallel passage in 1 Chron. xviii. 1 has it, "He took Gath and her towns out of the hand of the Philistines." This last rendering is quite plain; the other passage must be explained in its light. Gath, the city of King Achish, to which David had fled twice for refuge, now fell into his hands. The loss of Gath must have been a great humiliation to the Philistines; not even Samson had ever inflicted on them such a blow. And the policy that led David (it could hardly have been without painful feelings) to possess himself of Gath turned out successful; the aggressive spirit of the Philistines was now fairly subdued, and Israel finally delivered from the attacks of a neighbour that had kept them for many generations in constant discomfort.

2. His next campaign was against Moab. As David himself had at one time taken refuge in Gath, so he had committed his father and mother to the custody of the king of Moab (1 Sam. xxii. 3, 4). Jewish writers have a tradition that after a time the king put his parents to death, and that this was the origin of the war which he carried on against them. That David had received from them some strong provocation, and deemed it necessary to inflict a crushing blow for the security of that part of his kingdom, it seems hardly possible to doubt. Ingratitude was none of his failings, nor would he

who was so grateful to the men of Jabesh-gilead for burying Saul and his sons have been severe on Moab if Moab had acted the part of a true friend in caring for his father and mother. When we read of the severity practised on the army of Moab, we are shocked. And yet it is recorded rather as a token of forbearance than a mark of severity. How came it that the Moabite army was so completely in David's power? Usually, as we have seen, when an army was defeated it was pursued by the victors, and in the course of the flight a terrible slaughter ensued. But the Moabite army had come into David's power comparatively whole. This could only have been through some successful piece of generalship, by which David had shut them up in a position where resistance was impossible. Many an Eastern conqueror would have put the whole army to the sword; David with a measuring line measured two-thirds for destruction and a full third for preservation. Thus the Moabites in the south-east were subdued as thoroughly as the Philistines in the south-west, and brought tribute to the conqueror, in token of their subjection. The explanation of some commentators that it was not the army, but the fortresses, of Moab that David dealt with is too strained to be for a moment entertained. It proceeds on a desire to make David superior to his age, on unwillingness to believe, what, however, lies on the very surface of the story, that in the main features of his warlike policy he fell in with the maxims and spirit of the time.

3. The third of his campaigns was against Hadad-ezer, the son of Rehob, king of Zobah. It is said in the chapter before us that the encounter with this prince took place "as he went to recover his border at the

river Euphrates;" in the parallel passage of 1 Chronicles it is "as he went to stablish his dominion by the river Euphrates." The natural interpretation is, that David was on his way to establish his dominion by the river Euphrates, when this Hadadezer came out to oppose him. The terms of the covenant of God with Abraham assigned to him the land "from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. xv. 18), and when the territory was again defined to Joshua, its boundary was "from the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates." Under the provisions of this covenant, as made by Him whose is the earth and the fulness thereof, David held himself entitled to fix the boundary of his dominion by the banks of the river. In what particular form he designed to do this, we are not informed; but whatever may have been his purpose, Hadadezer set himself to defeat it. The encounter with Hadadezer could not but have been serious to David, for his enemy had a great force of military chariots and horsemen against whom he could oppose no force of the same kind. Nevertheless, David's victory was complete; and in dealing with that very force in which he himself was utterly deficient, he was quite triumphant; for he took from his opponent a thousand and seven hundred horsemen, as well as twenty thousand footmen. There must have been some remarkable stroke of genius in this achievement, for nothing is more apt to embarrass and baffle a commonplace general than the presence of an opposing force to which his army affords no counterpart.

4. But though David had defeated Hadadezer, not far, as we suppose, from the base of Mount Hermon, his path to the Euphrates was by no means clear. Another body of Syrians, the Syrians of Damascus,

having come from that city to help Hadadezer, seem to have been too late for this purpose, and to have encountered David alone. This, too, was a very serious enterprise for David; for though we are not informed whether, like Hadadezer, they had arms which the king of Israel could not match, it is certain that the army of so rich and civilized a state as Syria of Damascus would possess all the advantages that wealth and experience could bestow. But in his battle with them, David was again completely victorious. The slaughter was very great—two-and-twenty thousand men. This immense figure illustrates our remark a little while ago: that the slaughter of defeated and retreating armies was usually prodigious. So entire was the humiliation of this proud and ancient kingdom, that "the Syrians became servants to David, and brought presents," thus acknowledging his suzerainty over them. Between the precious things that were thus offered to King David and the spoil which he took from captured cities, he brought to Jerusalem an untold mass of wealth, which he afterwards dedicated for the building of the Temple.

5. In one case, the campaign was a peaceful one. "When Toi, king of Hamath, heard that David had smitten all the host of Hadadezer, then Toi sent Joram his son unto King David to salute him and to bless him, because he had fought against Hadadezer and had smitten him, for Hadadezer had wars with Toi." The kingdom of Toi lay in the valley between the two parallel ranges of Lebanon and anti-Lebanon, and it too was within the promised boundary, which extended to "the entering in of Hamath." Accordingly, the son of Toi brought with him vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and vessels of brass; these also did King David dedicate to the Lord. The fame of David as a warrior

was now such, at least in these northern regions, that further resistance seemed out of the question. Submission was the only course when the conqueror was evidently supported by the might of Heaven.

6. In the south, however, there seems to have been more of a spirit of opposition. No particulars of the campaign against the Edomites are given; but it is stated that David put garrisons in Edom; "throughout all Edom put he garrisons, and all the Edomites became servants to David." The placing of garrisons through all their country shows how obstinate these Edomites were, and how certain to have returned to fresh acts of hostility had they not been held in restraint by these garrisons. From the introduction to Psalm lx. it would appear that the insurrection of Edom took place while David was in the north contending with the two bodies of Syrians that opposed him—the Syrians of Zobah and those of Damascus. It would appear that Joab was detached from the army in Syria in order that he might deal with the Edomites. In the introduction to the Psalm, twelve thousand of the Edomites are said to have fallen in the Valley of Salt. In the passage now before us, it is said that eighteen thousand Syrians fell in that valley. The Valley of Salt is in the territory of Edom. It may be that a detachment of Syrian troops was sent to aid the Edomites, and that both sustained a terrible slaughter. Or it may be that, as in Hebrew the words for Syria and Edom are very similar (ארם and אדם), the one word may by accident have been substituted for the other.

7. Mention is also made of the Ammonites, the Amalekites, and the Philistines as having been subdued by David. Probably in the case of the Philistines and

the Amalekites the reference is to the previous campaign already recorded, while the Ammonite campaign may be the one of which we have the record afterwards. But the reference to these campaigns is accompanied with no particulars.

Twice in the course of this chapter we read that "the Lord gave David victory whithersoever he went." It does not appear, however, that the victory was always purchased with ease, or the situation of David and his armies free from serious dangers. The sixtieth Psalm, the title of which ascribes it to this period, makes very plain allusion to a time of extraordinary trouble and disaster in connection with one of these campaigns. "O God, Thou hast cast us off; Thou hast scattered us; Thou hast been displeased: oh turn Thyself to us again." It is probable that when David first encountered the Syrians he was put to great straits, his difficulty being aggravated by his distance from home and the want of suitable supplies. If the Edomites, taking advantage of his difficulty, chose the time to make an attack on the southern border of the kingdom, and if the king was obliged to diminish his own force by sending Joab against Edom, with part of his men, his position must have been trying indeed. But David did not let go his trust in God; courage and confidence came to him by prayer, and he was able to say, "Through God we shall do valiantly; for He it is that shall tread down all our enemies."

The effect of these victories must have been very striking. In the Song of the Bow, David had celebrated the public services of Saul, who had "clothed the daughters of Israel in scarlet, with other delights, who had put on ornaments of gold on their apparel"; but

all that Saul had done for the kingdom was now thrown into the shade by the achievements of David. With all his bravery, Saul had never been able to subdue his enemies, far less to extend the limits of the kingdom. David accomplished both; and it is the secret of the difference that is expressed in the words, "The Lord gave victory to David whithersoever he went." It is one of the great lessons of the Old Testament that the godly man can and does perform his duty better than any other man, because the Lord is with him: that whether he be steward of a house, or keeper of a prison, or ruler of a kingdom, like Joseph; or a judge and lawgiver, like Moses; or a warrior, like Samson, or Gideon, or Jephthah; or a king, like David, or Jehoshaphat, or Josiah; or a prime minister, like Daniel, his godliness helps him to do his duty as no other man can do his. This is especially a prominent lesson in the book of Psalms; it is inscribed on its very portals; for the godly man, as the very first Psalm tells us, "shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

In these warlike expeditions, King David foreshadowed the spiritual conquests of the Son of David, who went forth "conquering and to conquer," staggered for a moment, as in Gethsemane, by the rude shock of confederate enemies, but through prayer regaining his confidence in God, and triumphing in the hour and power of darkness. That noble effusion of fire and feeling, the sixty-eighth Psalm, seems to have been written in connection with these wars. The soul of the Psalmist is stirred to its depths; the majestic goings of Jehovah, recently witnessed

by the nation, have roused his most earnest feelings, and he strains every nerve to produce a like feeling in the people. The recent exploits of the king are ranked with His doings when He marched before His people through the wilderness, and Mount Sinai shook before Him. Great delight is expressed in God's having taken up His abode on His holy hill, in the exaltation of His people in connection with that step, and likewise in looking forward to the future and anticipating the peaceful triumphs when "princes should come out of Egypt, and Ethiopia stretch forth her arms to God." Benevolent and missionary longings mingle with the emotions of the conqueror and the feelings of the patriot.

"Sing unto the Lord, ye kingdoms of the earth;
Oh, sing praises unto the Lord,
To Him that rideth upon the heaven of heavens that are of old.
Lo, He uttereth His voice, and that a mighty voice."

It is interesting to see how in this extension of his influence among heathen nations, the Psalmist began to cherish and express these missionary longings, and to call on the nations to sing praises unto the Lord. It has been remarked that, in the ordinary course of Providence, the Bible follows the sword, that the seed of the Gospel falls into furrows that have been prepared by war. Of this missionary spirit we find many evidences in the Psalms. It was delightful to the Psalmist to think of the spiritual blessings that were to spread even beyond the limits of the great empire that now owned the sway of the king of Israel. Mount Zion was to become the birth-place of the nations; from Egypt and Babylonia, from Philistia, Tyre, and Ethiopia, additions were to be made to her citizens (Ps. lxxxvii.). "The people shall

be gathered together, and the nations, to serve the Lord" (Ps. cii. 22). "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Him" (Ps. xxii. 27). "All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and worship before Thee, O Lord; and they shall glorify Thy name" (Ps. lxxxvi. 9). "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise" (Ps. c. 1, 4).

Alas, the era of wars has not yet passed away. Even Christian nations have been woefully slow to apply the Christian precept, "Inasmuch as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." But let us at least make an earnest endeavour that if there must be war, its course may be followed up by the heralds of mercy, and that wherever there may occur "the battle of the warrior, and garments rolled in blood," there also it may speedily be proclaimed, "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government is on His shoulders: and His name is called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. ix. 6).

CHAPTER XI.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE KINGDOM.

2 SAMUEL viii. 15—18.

IF the records of David's warlike expeditions are brief, still more so are the notices of his work of peace. How he fulfilled his royal functions when there was no war to draw him from home, and to engross the attention both of the king and his officers of state, is told us here in the very briefest terms, barely affording even the outline of a picture. Yet it is certain that the activity of David's character, his profound interest in the welfare of his people, and his remarkable talent for administration, led in this department to very conspicuous and remarkable results. Some of the Psalms afford glimpses both of the principles on which he acted, and the results at which he aimed, that are fitted to be of much use in filling up the bare skeleton now before us. In this point of view, the subject may become interesting and instructive, as undoubtedly it is highly important. For we must remember that it was with reference to the spirit in which he was to rule that David was called the man after God's heart, and that he formed such a contrast to his predecessor. And further we are to bear in mind that in respect of the moral and spiritual qualities of his reign David had for his Successor the Lord Jesus Christ. "The Lord God will give

unto Him the throne of His servant David," said the angel Gabriel to Mary, "and He shall reign over the house of Judah for ever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end." It becomes us to make the most of what is told us of the peaceful administration of David's kingdom, in order to understand the grounds on which our Lord is said to have occupied His throne.

The first statement in the verses before us is comprehensive and suggestive: "And David reigned over all Israel; and David executed judgment and justice unto all his people." The first thing pointed out to us here is the catholicity of his kingly government, embracing *all* Israel, *all* people. He did not bestow his attention on one favoured section of the people, to the neglect or careless oversight of the rest. He did not, for example, seek the prosperity of his own tribe, Judah, to the neglect of the other eleven. In a word, there was no favouritism in his reign. This is not to say that he did not like some of his subjects better than the rest. There is every reason to believe that he liked the tribe of Judah best. But whatever preferences of this kind he may have had—and he would not have been man if he had had none—they did not limit or restrict his royal interest; they did not prevent him from seeking the welfare of every portion of the land, of every section of the people. Just as, in the days when he was a shepherd, there were probably some of his sheep and lambs for which he had a special affection, yet that did not prevent him from studying the welfare of the whole flock and of every animal in it with most conscientious care; so was it with his people. The least interesting of them were sacred in his eyes. They were part of his charge, and they were to be studied and cared for in the same manner as the rest. In this he reflected that

universality of God's care on which we find the Psalmist dwelling with such complacency: "The Lord is good to all; and His tender mercies are over all His works. The eyes of all wait upon Thee; and Thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest Thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." And may we not add that this quality of David's rule foreshadowed the catholicity of Christ's kingdom and His glorious readiness to bestow blessing on every side? "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." "On the last, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink." "Where there is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcision nor uncircumcision, bond nor free; but Christ is all and in all." "Ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

In the next place, we have much to learn from the statement that the most prominent thing that David did was to "execute judgment and justice to the people." That was the solid foundation on which all his benefits rested. And these words are not words of form or words of course. For it is never said that Saul did anything of the kind. There is nothing to show that Saul was really interested in the welfare of the people, or that he took any pains to secure that just and orderly administration on which the prosperity of his kingdom depended. And most certainly they are not words that could have been used of the ordinary government of Oriental kings. Tyranny, injustice, oppression, robbery of the poor by the rich, government by favourites more cruel and unprincipled than their masters, imprisonments, fines, conspiracies, and assassinations, were the usual features of Eastern government. And to a great extent they are features of the

government of Syria and other Eastern countries even at the present day. It is in vivid contrast to all these things that it is said, "David executed judgment and justice." Perhaps there is no need for assigning a separate meaning to each of these words; they may be regarded as just a forcible combination to denote the all-pervading justice which was the foundation of the whole government. He was just in the laws which he laid down, and just in the decisions which he gave. He was inaccessible to bribes, proof against the influence of the rich and powerful, and deaf in such matters to every plea of expediency; he regarded nothing but the scales of justice. What confidence and comfort an administration of this kind brought may in some measure be inferred from the extraordinary satisfaction of many an Eastern people at this day when the administration of justice is committed even to foreigners, if their one aim will be to deal justly with all. On this foundation, as on solid rock, a ruler may go on to devise many things for the welfare of his people. But apart from this any scheme of general improvement which may be devised is sure to be a failure, and all the money and wisdom and practical ability that may be expended upon it will only share the fate of the numberless cart-loads of solid material in the "Pilgrim's Progress" that were cast into the Slough of Despond.

This idea of equal justice to all, and especially to those who had no helper, was a very beautiful one in David's eyes. It gathered round it those bright and happy features which in the seventy-second Psalm are associated with the administration of another King. "Give the king Thy judgments, O God, and Thy righteousness to the king's son. He shall judge Thy people with righteousness, and Thy poor with judgment." The

beauty of a just government is seen most clearly in its treatment of the poor. It is the poor who suffer most from unrighteous rulers. Their feebleness makes them easier victims. Their poverty prevents them from dealing in golden bribes. If they have little individually wherewith to enrich the oppressor, their numbers make up for the small share of each. Very beautiful, therefore, is the government of the king who "shall judge the poor of the people, who shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor." The thought is one on which the Psalmist dwells with great delight. "He shall deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence, and precious shall their blood be in his sight." So far from need and poverty repelling him, they rather attract him. His interest and his sympathy are moved by the cry of the destitute. He would fain lighten the burdens that weigh them down so heavily, and give them a better chance in the struggle of life. He would do something to elevate their life above the level of mere hewers of wood and drawers of water. He recognises fully the brotherhood of man.

And in all this we find the features of that higher government of David's Son which shows so richly His most gracious nature. The cry of sorrow and need, as it rose from this dark world, did not repel, but rather attracted, Him. Though the woes of man sprang from his own misdeeds, He gave Himself to bear them and carry their guilt away. All were in the lowest depths of spiritual poverty, but for that reason His hand was the more freely offered for their help. The one condition on which that help was given was, that they

should own their poverty, and acknowledge Him as their Benefactor, and accept all as a free gift at His hands.

But more than that, the condition of the poor in the natural sense was very interesting to Jesus. It was with that class He threw in His lot. It was among them He lived; it was their sorrows and trials He knew by personal experience; it was their welfare for which He laboured most. Always accessible to every class, most respectful to the rich, and ever ready to bestow His blessings wherever they were prized, yet it was true of Christ that "He spared the poor and needy and saved the souls of the needy." And in a temporal point of view, one of the most striking effects of Christ's religion is, that it has so benefited, and tends still more to benefit, the poor. Slavery and tyranny are among its most detested things. Regard for man as man is one of its highest principles. It detects the spark of Divinity in every human soul, grievously overlaid with the scum and filth of the world; and it seeks to cleanse and brighten it, till it shine forth in clear and heavenly lustre. It is a most Christian thought that the gems in the kingdom of God are not to be found merely where respectability and culture disguise the true spiritual condition of humanity, but even among those who outwardly are lost and disreputable. Not the least honourable of the reproachful terms applied to Jesus was—"the Friend of publicans and sinners."

We are not to think of David, however, as being satisfied if he merely secured justice to the poor and succeeded in lightening their yoke. His ulterior aim was to fill his kingdom with active, useful, honourable citizens. This is plain from the beautiful language of some of the Psalms. Both for old and young, he had a

beautiful ideal. "The righteous shall flourish as the palm tree; he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing" (Ps. xcii. 12-14). And so for the young his desire was—"That our sons may be as plants, grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace." Moral beauty, and especially the beauty of active and useful lives, was the great object of his desire. Can anything be better or more enlightened as a royal policy than that which we thus see to have been David's—in the first place, a policy of universal justice; in the second place, of special regard for those who on the one hand are most liable to oppression and on the other are most in need of help and encouragement; and in the third place, a policy whose aim is to promote excellence of character, and to foster in the young those graces and virtues which wear longest, which preserve the freshness and enjoyment of life to the end, and which crown their possessors, even in old age, with the respect and the affection of all?

The remaining notices of David's administration in the passage before us are simply to the effect that the government consisted of various departments, and that each department had an officer at its head.

1. There was the military department, at the head of which was Joab, or rather he was over "the host"—the great muster of the people for military purposes. A more select body, "the Cherethites and the Pelethites," seems to have formed a bodyguard for the king, or a band of household troops, and was under a separate commander. The troops forming "the host" were

divided into twelve courses of twenty-four thousand each, regularly officered, and for one month of the year the officers of one of the courses, and probably the people, or some of them, attended on the king at Jerusalem (1 Chron. xxvii. 1). Of the most distinguished of his soldiers who excelled in feats of personal valour, David seems to have formed a legion of honour, conspicuous among whom were the thirty honourable, and the three who excelled in honour (2 Sam. xxiii. 28). It is certain that whatever extra power could be given by careful organization to the fighting force of the country, the army of Israel under David possessed it in the fullest degree.

2. There was the civil department, at the head of which were Jehoshaphat the recorder and Seraiah the scribe or secretary. While these were in attendance on David at Jerusalem, they did not supersede the ordinary home rule of the tribes of Israel. Each tribe had still its prince or ruler, and continued, under a general superintendence from the king, to conduct its local affairs (1 Chron. xxvii. 16-22). The supreme council of the nation continued to assemble on occasions of great national importance (1 Chron. xxviii. 1), and though its influence could not have been so great as it was before the institution of royalty, it continued an integral element of the constitution, and in the time of Rehoboam, through its influence and organization (1 Kings xii. 3, 16), the kingdom of the ten tribes was set up, almost without a struggle (1 Chron. xxiii. 4). This home-rule system, besides interesting the people greatly in the prosperity of the country, was a great check against the abuse of the royal authority; and it is a proof that the confidence of Rehoboam in the stability of his government, confirmed perhaps by a

superstitious view of that promise to David, must have been an absolute infatuation, the product of utter inexperience on his part, and of the most foolish counsel ever tendered by professional advisers.

3. Ecclesiastical administration. The capture of Jerusalem and its erection into the capital of the kingdom made a great change in ecclesiastical arrangements. For some time before it would have been hard to tell where the ecclesiastical capital was to be found. Shiloh had been stripped of its glory when Ichabod received his name, and the Philistine armies destroyed the place. Nob had shared a similar fate at the hands of Saul. The old tabernacle erected by Moses in the wilderness was at Gibeon (1 Chron. xxi. 29), and remained there even after the removal of the ark to Zion (1 Kings iii. 4). At Hebron, too, there must have been a shrine while David reigned there. But from the time when David brought up the ark to Jerusalem, that city became the greatest centre of the national worship. There the services enjoined by the law of Moses were celebrated; it became the scene of the great festivals of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles.

We are told that the heads of the ecclesiastical department were Zadok the son of Ahitub and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar. These represented the elder and the younger branches of the priesthood. Zadok was the lineal descendant of Eleazar, Aaron's son (1 Chron. vi. 12), and was therefore the constitutional successor to the high-priesthood. Ahimelech the son of Abiathar represented the family of Eli, who seems to have been raised to the high-priesthood out of order, perhaps in consequence of the illness or incompetence of the legitimate high-priest. It is of some interest to note the fact that under David two men were at the

head of the priesthood, much as it was in the days of our Lord, when Annas and Caiaphas are each called the high-priest. The ordinary priests were divided into four-and-twenty courses, and each course served in its turn for a limited period, an arrangement which still prevailed in the days of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist. A systematic arrangement of the Levites was likewise made; some were allocated to the service of the Temple, some were porters, some were singers, and some were officers and judges. Of the six thousand who filled the last-named office, "chief fathers" as they were called, nearly a half were allocated among the tribes east of the Jordan, as being far from the centre, and more in need of oversight. It is probable that this large body of Levites were not limited to strictly judicial duties, but that they performed important functions in other respects, perhaps as teachers, physicians, and registrars. It is not said that Samuel's schools of the prophets received any special attention, but the deep interest that David must have taken in Samuel's work, and his early acquaintance with its effects, leave little room to doubt that these institutions were carefully fostered, and owed to David some share of the vitality which they continued to exhibit in the days of Elijah and Elisha. It is very probable that the prophets Gad and Nathan were connected with these institutions.

It is scarcely possible to say how far these careful ecclesiastical arrangements were instrumental in fostering the spirit of genuine piety. But there is too much reason to fear that even in David's time that element was very deficient. The bursts of religious enthusiasm that occasionally rolled over the country were no sure indications of piety in a people easily roused to

temporary gushes of feeling, but deficient in stability. There often breathes in David's psalms a sense of loneliness, a feeling of his being a stranger on the earth, that seems to show that he wanted congenial company, that the atmosphere was not of the godly quality he must have wished. The bloody Joab was his chief general, and at a subsequent period the godless Ahithophel was his chief counsellor. It is even probable that the intense piety of David brought him many secret enemies. The world has no favour for men, be they kings or priests, that repudiate all compromise in religion, and insist on God being regarded with supreme and absolute honour. Where religion interferes with their natural inclinations and lays them under inviolable obligations to have regard to the will of God, they rebel in their hearts against it, and they hate those who consistently uphold its claims. The nation of Israel appears to have been pervaded by an undercurrent of dislike to the eminent holiness of David, which, though kept in check by his distinguished services and successes, at last burst out with terrific violence in the rebellion of Absalom. That villainous movement would not have had the vast support it received, especially in Jerusalem, if even the people of Judah had been saturated with the spirit of genuine piety. We cannot think much of the piety of a people that rose up against the sweet singer of Israel and the great benefactor of the nation, and that seemed to anticipate the cry, "Not this man, but Barabbas."

The systematic administration of his kingdom by King David was the fruit of a remarkable faculty of orderly arrangement that belonged to most of the great men of Israel. We see it in Abraham, in his prompt and successful marshalling of his servants to

pursue and attack the kings of the East when they carried off Lot; we see it in Joseph, first collecting and then distributing the stores of food in Egypt; in Moses, conducting that marvellous host in order and safety through the wilderness; and, in later times, in Ezra and Nehemiah, reducing the chaos which they found at Jerusalem to a state of order and prosperity which seemed to verify the vision of the dry bones. We see it in the Son of David, in the orderly way in which all His arrangements were made: the sending forth of the twelve Apostles and the seventy disciples, the arranging of the multitude when He fed the five thousand, and the careful gathering up of the fragments "that nothing be lost." In the spiritual kingdom, a corresponding order is demanded, and times of peace and rest in the Church are times when this development is specially to be studied. Spiritual order, spiritual harmony: God in His own place, and self, with all its powers and interests, as well as our brethren, our neighbours, and the world, all in their's—this is the great requisite in the individual heart. The development of this holy order in the *individual* soul; the development of *family* graces, the due Christian ordering of homes; the development of *public* graces—patriotism, freedom, godliness, in the State, and in the Church of the spirit that seeks the instruction of the ignorant, the recovery of the erring, the comforting of the wretched, and the advancement everywhere of the cause of Christ—in a word, the increase of spiritual wealth—these very specially are objects to which in all times, but especially in quiet times, all hearts and energies should be turned. What can be more honourable, what can be more blessed, than to help in advancing these? More life, more grace, more prayer, more progress, more mis-

sionary ardour, more self-denying love, more spiritual beauty—what higher objects can the Christian minister aim at? And how better can the Christian king or the Christian statesman fulfil and honour his office than by using his influence, so far as he legitimately may, in furthering the virtues and habits characteristic of men that fear God while they honour the king?

CHAPTER XII.

DAVID AND MEPHIBOSHETH.

2 SAMUEL ix.

THE busy life which King David was now leading did not prevent memory from occasionally running back to his early days and bringing before him the friends of his youth. Among these remembrances of the past, his friendship and his covenant with Jonathan were sure to hold a conspicuous place. On one of these occasions the thought occurred to him that possibly some descendant of Jonathan might still be living. He had been so completely severed from his friend during the last years of his life, and the unfortunate attempt on the part of Ishbosheth had made personal intercourse so much more difficult, that he seems not to have been aware of the exact state of Jonathan's family. It is evident that the survival of any descendant of his friend was not publicly known, and probably the friends of the youth who was discovered had thought it best to keep his existence quiet, being of those who would give David no credit for higher principles than were current between rival dynasties. Even Michal, Jonathan's sister, does not seem to have known that a son of his survived. It became necessary, therefore, to make a public inquiry of his officers and attendants. "Is there yet any that is left of the house

of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" It was not essential that he should be a child of Jonathan's; any descendant of Saul's would have been taken for Jonathan's sake.

It is a proof that the bloody wars in which he had been engaged had not destroyed the tenderness of his heart, that the very chapter which follows the account of his battles opens with a yearning of affection—a longing for an outlet to feelings of kindness. It is instructive, too, to find the proof of love to his neighbour succeeding the remarkable evidence of supreme regard to the honour of God recently given in the proposal to build a temple. This period of David's life was its golden era, and it is difficult to understand how the man that was so remarkable at this time for his regard for God and his interest in his neighbour should soon afterwards have been betrayed into a course of conduct that showed him most grievously forgetful of both.

This proceeding of David's in making inquiry for a fit object of beneficence may afford us a lesson as to the true course of enlightened kindness. Doubtless David had numberless persons applying for a share of his bounty; yet he makes inquiry for a new channel in which it may flow. The most clamorous persons are seldom the most deserving, and if a bountiful man simply recognises, however generously, even the best of the cases that press themselves on his notice, he will not be satisfied with the result; he will feel that his bounty has rather been frittered away on miscellaneous undertakings, than that it has achieved any solid and satisfying result. It is easy for a rich man to fling a pittance to some wretched-looking creature that whines out a tale of horror in his ear; but this may be done only to relieve his own feelings, and harm

instead of good may be the result. Enlightened benevolence aims at something higher than the mere relief of passing distress. Benevolent men ought not to lie at the mercy either of the poor who ask their charity, or of the philanthropic Christians who appeal for support to their schemes. Pains must be taken to find out the deserving, to find out those who have the strongest claim. Even the open-handed, whose purse is always at hand, and who are ready for every good work, may be neglecting some case or class of cases which have far stronger claims on them than those which are so assiduously pressed on their notice.

And hence we may see that it is right and fitting, especially in those to whom Providence has given much, to cast over in their minds, from time to time, the state of their obligations, and think whether among old friends, or poor relations, or faithful but needy servants of God, there may not be some who have a claim on their bounty. There are other debts besides money debts it becomes you to look after. In youth, perhaps, you received much kindness from friends and relatives which at the time you could not repay; but now the tables are turned; you are prosperous, they or their families are needy. And these cases are apt to slip out of mind. It is not always hard-heartedness that makes the prosperous forget the less fortunate; it is often utter thoughtlessness. It is the neglect of that rule which has such a powerful though silent effect when it is carried out—Put yourself in their place. Imagine how you would feel, strained and worried to sleeplessness through narrow means, and seeing old friends rolling in wealth, who might, with little or no inconvenience, lighten the burden that is crushing you so painfully. It is a strange thing that

this counsel should be more needed by the rich than by the poor. Thoughtlessness regarding his neighbours is not a poor man's vice. The empty house is remembered, even though it costs a sacrifice to send it a little of his own scanty supplies. Few men are so hardened as not to feel the obligation to show kindness when that obligation is brought before them. What we urge is, that no one should lie at the mercy of others for bringing his obligations before him. Let him think for himself; and especially let him cast his eye round his own horizon, and consider whether there be not some representatives of old friends or old relations to whom kindness ought to be shown.

To return to the narrative. The history of Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, had been a sad one. When Israel was defeated by the Philistines on Mount Gilboa, and Saul and Jonathan were slain, he was but an infant; and his nurse, terror-stricken at the news of the disaster, in her haste to escape had let him fall, and caused an injury which made him lame for life. What the manner of his upbringing was, we are not told. When David found him, he was living with Machir, the son of Ammiel, of Lo-debar, on the other side of the Jordan, in the same region where his uncle Ishbosheth had tried to set up his kingdom. Mephibosheth became known to David through Ziba, a servant of Saul's, a man of more substance than principle, as his conduct showed at a later period of his life. Ziba, we are told, had fifteen sons and twenty servants. He seems to have contrived to make himself comfortable notwithstanding the wreck of his master's fortunes, more comfortable than Mephibosheth, who was living in another man's house.

There seems to have been a surmise among David's

people that this Ziba could tell something of Jonathan's family; but evidently he was not very ready to do so; for it was only to David himself that when sent for he gave the information, and that after David had emphatically stated his motive—not to do harm, but to show kindness for Jonathan's sake. The existence of Mephibosheth being thus made known, he is sent for and brought into David's presence. And we cannot but be sorry for him when we mark his abject bearing in the presence of the king. When he was come unto David, "he fell on his face and did reverence." And when David explained his intentions, "he bowed himself and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look on such a dead dog as I am?" Naturally of a timid nature, and weakened in nerve by the accident of his infancy, he must have grown up under great disadvantages. His lameness excluded him from sharing in any youthful game or manly exercise, and therefore threw him into the company of the women who, like him, tarried at home. What he had heard of David had not come through a friendly channel, had come through the partisans of Saul, and was not likely to be very favourable. He was too young to remember the generous conduct of David in reference to his father and grandfather; and those who were about him probably did not care to say much about it.

Accustomed to think that his wisest course was to conceal from David his very existence, and looking on him with the dread with which the family of former kings regarded the reigning monarch, he must have come into his presence with a strange mixture of feeling. He had a profound sense of the greatness which David had achieved and the honour implied in

his countenance and fellowship. But there was no need for his humbling himself so low. There was no need for his calling himself a dog, a dead dog,—the most humiliating image it was possible to find. We should have thought him more worthy of his father if, recognizing the high position which David had attained by the grace of God, he had gracefully thanked him for the regard shown to his father's memory, and shown more of the self-respect which was due to Jonathan's son. In his subsequent conduct, in the days of David's calamity, Mephibosheth gave evidence of the same disinterested spirit which had shone so beautifully in Jonathan, but his noble qualities were like a light twinkling among ruins or a jewel glistening in a wreck.

This shattered condition both of mind and body, however, commended him all the more to the friendly regard of David. Had he shown himself a high-minded, ambitious youth, David might have been embarrassed how to act towards him. Finding him modest and respectful, he had no difficulty in the case. The kindness which he showed him was twofold. In the first place, he restored to him all the land that had belonged to his grandfather; and in the second place, he made him an inmate of his own house, with a place at his table, the same as if he had been one of his own sons. And that he might not be embarrassed with having the land to care for, he committed the charge of it to Ziba, who was to bring to Mephibosheth the produce or its value.

Every arrangement was thus made that could conduce to his comfort. His being a cripple did not deprive him of the honour of a place at the royal table, little though he could contribute to the lustre of the palace. For David bestowed his favours not on the

principle of trying to reflect lustre on himself or his house, but on the principle of doing good to those who had a claim on his consideration. The lameness and consequent awkwardness, that would have made many a king ashamed of such an inmate of his palace only recommended him the more to David. Regard for outward appearances was swallowed up by a higher regard—regard for what was right and true.

It might be thought by some that such an incident as this was hardly worthy of a place in the sacred record; but the truth is, that David seldom showed more of the true spirit of God than he did on this occasion. The feeling that led him to seek out any stray member of the house in order to show kindness to him was the counterpart of that feeling that has led God from the very beginning to seek the children of men, and that led Jesus to seek and to save that which was lost. For that is truly the attitude in which God has ever placed Himself towards our fallen race. The sight to be seen in this world has not been that of men seeking after God, but that of God seeking after men. All day long He has been stretching forth His hands, and inviting the children of men to taste and see that He is gracious. If we ask for the principle that unifies all parts of the Bible, it is this gracious attitude of God towards those who have forfeited His favour. The Bible presents to us the sight of God's Spirit striving with men, persevering in the thankless work long after He has been resisted, and ceasing only when all hope of success through further pleading is gone.

There were times when this process was prosecuted with more than common ardour; and at last there came a time when the Divine pleadings reached a climax, and God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake

to the fathers by the prophets, spake to them at last by His own Son. And what was the life of Jesus Christ but a constant appeal to men, in God's name, to accept the kindness which God was eager to show them? Was not His invitation to all that laboured and were heavy laden, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest"? Did He not represent the Father as a householder, making a marriage feast for his son, sending forth his servants to bid the guests to the wedding, and when the natural guests refused, bidding them go to the highways and the hedges, and fetch the lame and the blind and any outcast they could find, because he longed to see guests of some kind enjoying the good things he had provided? The great crime of the ancient Jews was rejecting Him who had come in the name of the Lord to bless them. Their crowning condemnation was, not that they had failed to keep the Ten Commandments, though that was true; not that they had spent their lives in pleasing themselves instead of pleasing God, though that also was true; but that they had rejected God's unspeakable gift, and requited the Eternal Son, when He came from heaven to bless them, with the cursed death of the cross. But even after they had committed that act of unprecedented wickedness, God's face would not be wholly turned away from them. The very attitude in which Jesus died, with His hands outstretched on the tree, would still represent the attitude of the Divine heart towards the very murderers of His Son. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men toward Me." "Unto you first, God, having raised up His Son Jesus, hath sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out."

Here, my friends, is the most glorious feature of the Christian religion. Happy those of you who have apprehended this attitude of your most gracious Father, who have believed in His love, and who have accepted His grace! For not only has God received you back into His family, and given you a name and a place in His temple better than that of sons and daughters, but He has restored to you your lost inheritance. "If children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ." Nay, more, He has not only restored to you your lost inheritance, but He has conferred on you an inheritance more glorious than that of which sin deprived you. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last day."

But if the grace of God in thus stretching out His hands to sinful men and offering them all the blessings of salvation is very wonderful, it makes the case of those all the more terrible, all the more hopeless, who treat His invitations with indifference, and turn their backs on an inheritance the glory of which they do not see. How men should be so infatuated as to do this it were hard to understand, if we had not ample evidence of it in the godless tendencies of our natural hearts. Still more mysterious is it to understand how God should fail to carry His point in the case of those to whom He stretches out His hands. But of all considerations there is none more fitted to astonish and alarm the careless than that they are capable of refusing

all the appeals of Divine love, and rejecting all the bounty of Divine grace. If this be persevered in, what a rude awakening you will have in the world to come, when in all the bitterness of remorse you will think on the glories that were once within your reach, but with which you trifled when you had the chance! How foolish would Mephibosheth have been if he had disbelieved in David's kindness and rejected his offer! But David was sincere, and Mephibosheth believed in his sincerity. May we not, must we not, believe that God is sincere? If a purpose of kindness could arise in a human heart, how much more in the Divine heart, how much more in the heart of Him the very essence of whose nature is conveyed to us in the words of the beloved disciple—"God is love"!

There is yet another application to be made of this passage in David's history. We have seen how it exemplifies the duty incumbent on us all to consider whether kindness is not due from us to the friends or the relatives of those who have been helpful to ourselves. This remark is not applicable merely to temporal obligations, but also, and indeed emphatically, to spiritual. We should consider ourselves in debt to those who have conferred spiritual benefits upon us. Should a descendant of Luther or Calvin, of Latimer or Cranmer or Knox, appear among us in need of kindness, what true Protestant would not feel that for what he owed to the fathers it was his duty to show kindness to the children? But farther back even than this was a race of men to whom the Christian world lies under still deeper obligations. It was the race of David himself, to which had belonged "Moses and Aaron among His priests, Samuel with them that called on His name," and, in after-times, Isaiah and Jeremiah,

Ezekiel and Daniel; Peter, and James, and John, and Paul; and, outshining them all, like the sun of heaven, Jesus of Nazareth, the Saviour of men. With what models of lofty piety has that race furnished every succeeding generation! From the study of their holy lives, their soaring faith, their burning zeal, what blessing has been derived in the past, and what an impulse will yet go forth to the very end of time! No wonder though the Apostle had great sorrow and continual heaviness in his heart when he thought of the faithless state of the people, "to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God"! Yet none are more in need of your friendly remembrance at this day than the descendants of these men. It becomes you to ask, "Is there yet any that is left of their house to whom we may show kindness for Jesus' sake?" For God has not finally cast them off, and Jesus has not ceased to care for those who were His brethren according to the flesh. If there were no other motive to induce us to seek the good of the Jews, this consideration should surely prevail. Ill did the world requite its obligation during the long ages when all manner of contumely and injustice was heaped upon the Hebrew race, as if Jesus had never prayed, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do." Their treatment by the Gentiles has been so harsh that, even when better feelings prevail, they are slow, like Mephibosheth, —to believe that we mean them well. They may have done much to repel our kindness, and they may appear to be hopelessly encrusted with unbelief in Him whom we present as the Saviour. But charity never faileth; and in reference to them as to other objects of philanthropic effort, the exhortation holds good, "Let us not

be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not."

Such kindness to those who are in need is not only a duty of religion, but tends greatly to commend it. Neglect of those who have claims on us, while objects more directly religious are eagerly prosecuted, is not pleasing to God, whether the neglect take place in our lives or in the destination of our substance at death. "Give, and it shall be given unto you: good measure, pressed down and shaken together and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again."

CHAPTER XIII.

DAVID AND HANUN.

2 SAMUEL X.

POWERFUL though David had proved himself in every direction in the art of war, his heart was inclined to peace. A king who had been victorious over so many foes had no occasion to be afraid of a people like the Ammonites. It could not have been from fear therefore that, when Nahash the king of the Ammonites died, David resolved to send a friendly message to his son. Not the least doubt can be thrown on the statement of the history that what moved him to do this was a grateful remembrance of the kindness which he had at one time received from the late king. The position which he had gained as a warrior would naturally have made Hanun more afraid of David than David could be of Hanun. The king of Israel could not have failed to know this, and it might naturally occur to him that it would be a kindly act to the young king of Ammon to send him a message that showed that he might thoroughly rely on his friendly intentions. The message to Hanun was another emanation of a kindly heart. If there was anything of policy in it, it was the policy of one who felt that so many things are continually occurring to set nations against one another as to make it most desirable to improve every opportunity of drawing them closer together.

It is a happy thing for any country when its rulers and men of influence are ever on the watch for opportunities to strengthen the spirit of friendship. It is a happy thing in the Church when the leaders of different sections are more disposed to measures that conciliate and heal than to measures that alienate and divide. In family life, and wherever men of different views and different tempers meet, this peace-loving spirit is of great price. Men that like fighting, and that are ever disposed to taunt, to irritate, to divide, are the nuisances of society. Men that deal in the soft answer, in the message of kindness, and in the prayer of love, deserve the respect and gratitude of all.

It is a remarkable thing that, of all the nations that were settled in the neighbourhood of the Israelites, the only one that seemed desirous to live on friendly terms with them was that of Tyre. Even those who were related to them by blood,—Edomites, Midianites, Moabites, Ammonites,—were never cordial, and often at open hostility. Though their rights had been carefully respected by the Israelites on their march from Sinai to Palestine, no feeling of cordial friendship was established with any of them. None of them were impressed even so much as Balaam had been, when in language so beautiful he blessed the people whom God had blessed. None of them threw in their lot with Israel, in recognition of their exalted spiritual privileges, as Hobab and his people had done near Mount Sinai. Individuals, like Ruth the Moabitess, had learned to recognise the claims of Israel's God and the privileges of the covenant, but no entire nation had ever shown even an inclination to such a course. These neighbouring nations continued therefore to be fitting symbols of that world-power which has so generally

been found in antagonism to the people of God. Israel while they continued faithful to God were like the lily among thorns; and Israel's king, like Him whom he typified, was called to rule in the midst of his enemies. The friendship of the surrounding world cannot be the ordinary lot of the faithful servant, otherwise the Apostle would not have struck such a loud note of warning. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, would be the friend of the world is the enemy of God."

Between the Ammonites and the Israelites collisions had occurred on two former occasions, on both of which the Ammonites appear to have been the aggressors. The former of these was in the days of Jephthah. The defeat of the Ammonites at that time was very thorough, and probably unexpected, and, like other defeats of the same kind, it no doubt left feelings of bitter hatred rankling in the breasts of the defeated party. The second was the collision at Jabesh-gilead at the beginning of the reign of Saul. The king of the Ammonites showed great ferocity and cruelty on that occasion. When the men of Jabesh, brought to bay, begged terms of peace, the bitter answer was returned that it would be granted only on condition that every man's right eye should be put out. It was then that Saul showed such courage and promptitude. In the briefest space he was at Jabesh-gilead in defence of his people, and by his successful tactics inflicted on the Ammonites a tearible defeat, killing a great multitude and scattering the remainder, so that not any two of them were left together. Men do not like to have a prize plucked from their hands when they are on the eve of enjoying it. After such

a defeat, Nahash could not have very friendly feelings to Saul. And when Saul proclaimed David his enemy, Nahash would naturally incline to David's side. There is no record of the occasion on which he showed kindness to him, but in all likelihood it was at the time when he was in the wilderness, hiding from Saul. If, when David was near the head of the Dead Sea, and therefore not very far from the land of the Ammonites, or from places where they had influence, Nahash sent him any supplies for his men, the gift would be very opportune, and there could be no reason why David should not accept of it. Anyhow, the act of kindness, whatever it was, made a strong impression on his heart. It was long, long ago when it happened, but love has a long memory, and the remembrance of it was still pleasant to David. And now the king of Israel purposes to repay to the son the debt he had incurred to the father. Up to this point it is a pretty picture; and it is a great disappointment when we find the transaction miscarry, and a negotiation which began in all the warmth and sincerity of friendship terminate in the wild work of war.

The fault of this miscarriage, however, was glaringly on the other side. Hanun was a young king, and it would only have been in accordance with the frank and unsuspecting spirit of youth had he received David's communication with cordial pleasure, and returned to it an answer in the same spirit in which it was sent. But his counsellors were of another mind. They persuaded their master that the pretext of comforting him on the death of his father was a hollow one, and that David desired nothing but to spy out the city and the country, with a view to bring them under his dominion. It is hard to suppose that they really

believed this. It was they, not David, that wished a pretext for going to war. And having got something that by evil ingenuity might be perverted to this purpose, they determined to treat it so that it should be impossible for David to avoid the conflict. Hanun appears to have been a weak prince, and to have yielded to their counsels. Our difficulty is to understand how sane men could have acted in such a way. The determination to provoke war, and the insolence of their way of doing it, appear so like the freaks of a madman, that we cannot comprehend how reasonable men should in cold blood have even dreamt of such proceedings. Perhaps at this early period they had an understanding with those Syrians that afterwards came to their aid, and thought that on the strength of this they could afford to be insolent. The combined force which they could bring into the field would be such as to make even David tremble.

It is hardly necessary to say a word to bring out the outrageous character of their conduct. First, there was the repulse of David's kindness. It was not even declined with civility; it was repelled with scorn. It is always a serious thing to reject overtures of kindness. Even the friendly salutations of dumb animals are entitled to a friendly return, and the man that returns the caresses of his dog with a kick and a curse is a greater brute than the animal that he treats so unworthily. Kindness is too rare a gem to be trampled under foot. Even though it should be mistaken kindness, though the form it takes should prove an embarrassment rather than a help, a good man will appreciate the motive that prompted it, and will be careful not to hurt the feelings of those who, though they have blundered, meant him well. None are more liable to make mis-

takes than young children in their little efforts to please; meaning to be kind, they sometimes only give trouble The parent that gives way to irritation, and meets this with a volley of scolding, deals cruelly with the best and tenderest part of the child's nature. There are few things more deserving to be attended to through life than the habit not only of appreciating little kindnesses, but showing that you appreciate them. How much more sweetly might the current run in social life if this were universally attended to!

But Hanun not only repelled David's kindness, but charged him with meanness, and virtually flung in his face a challenge to war. To represent his apparent kindness as a mean cover of a hostile purpose was an act which Hanun might think little of, but which was fitted to wound David to the quick. Unscrupulous natures have a great advantage over others in the charges they may bring. In a street collision a man in dirty clothing is much more powerful for mischief than one in clean raiment. Rough, unscrupulous men are restrained by no delicacy from bringing atrocious charges against those to whom these charges are supremely odious. They have little sense of the sin of them, and they toss them about without scruple. Such poisoned arrows inflict great pain, not because the charges are just, but because it is horrible to refined natures even to hear them. There are two things that make some men very sensitive—the refinement of grace, and the refinement of the spirit of courtesy. The refinement of grace makes all sin odious, and makes a charge of gross sin very serious. The refinement of courtesy creates great regard to the feelings of others, and a strong desire not to wound them unnecessarily. In circles where real courtesy prevails, accu-

sations against others are commonly couched in very gentle language. Rough natures ridicule this spirit, and pride themselves on their honesty in calling a spade a spade. Evidently Hanun belonged to the rough, unscrupulous school. Either he did not know how it would make David writhe to be accused of the alleged meanness, or, if he did know, he enjoyed the spectacle. It gratified his insolent nature to see the pious king of Israel posing before all the people of Ammon as a sneak and a liar, and to hear the laugh of scorn and hatred resounding on every side.

To these offences Hanun added yet another—scornful treatment of David's ambassadors. In the eyes of all civilized nations the persons of ambassadors were held sacred, and any affront or injury to them was counted an odious crime. Very often men of eminent position, venerable age, and unblemished character were chosen for this function, and it is quite likely that David's ambassadors to Hanun were of this class. When therefore these men were treated with contumely—half their beards, which were in a manner sacred, shorn away, their garments mutilated, and their persons exposed—no grosser insult could have been inflicted. When the king and his princes were the authors of this treatment, it must have been greatly enjoyed by the mass of the people, whose coarse glee over the dishonoured ambassadors of the great King David one can easily imagine. It is a painful moment when true worth and nobility lie at the mercy of insolence and coarseness, and have to bear their bitter revilings. Such things may happen in public controversy in a country where the utmost liberty of speech is allowed, and when men of ruffian mould find contumely and insult their handiest weapons. In times of religious

persecution the most frightful charges have been hurled at the heads of godly men and women, whose real crime is to have striven to the utmost to obey God. Oh, how much need there is of patience to bear insult as well as injury! And insult will sometimes rouse the temper that injury does not ruffle. Oh for the spirit of Christ, who, when He was reviled, reviled not again!

The Ammonites did not wait for a formal declaration of war by David. Nor did they flatter themselves, when they came to their senses, that against one who had gained such renown as a warrior they could stand alone. Their insult to King David turned out a costly affair. To get assistance they had to give gold. The parallel passage in Chronicles gives a thousand talents of silver as the cost of the first bargain with the Syrians. These Syrian mercenaries came from various districts—Beth-rehob, Zoba, Beth-maacah, and Tob. Some of these had already been subdued by David; in other cases there was apparently no previous collision. But all of them no doubt smarted under the defeats which David had inflicted either on them or on their neighbours, and when a large subsidy was allotted to them to begin with, in addition to whatever booty might fall to their share if David should be subdued, it is no great wonder that an immense addition was made to the forces of the Ammonites. It became in fact a very formidable opposition; all the more that they were very abundantly supplied with chariots and horsemen, of which arm David had scarcely any. He met them first by sending out Joab and "all the host" of the mighty men. The whole resources of his army were forwarded. And when Joab came to the spot, he found that he had a double enemy to face. The Ammonite army came out from the city to encounter him, while the Syrian

army were encamped in the country, ready to place him between two fires when the battle began. To guard against this, Joab divided his force into two. The Syrian host was the more formidable body; therefore Joab went in person against it, at the head of a select body of troops chosen from the general army. The command of the remainder was given to his brother Abishai, who was left to deal with the Ammonites. If either section found its opponent too much for it, aid was to be given by the other. No fault can be found either with the arrangements made by Joab for the encounter or the spirit in which he entered on the fight. "Be of good courage," he said to his men, "and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God; and the Lord do that which seemeth to Him good." It was just such an exhortation as David himself might have given. Some were trusting in chariots and some in horses, but they were remembering the name of the Lord their God. The first movement was made by Joab and his part of the army against the Syrians; it was completely successful; the Syrians fled before him, chariots and horsemen and all. When the Ammonite army saw the fate of the Syrians they did not even hazard a conflict, but wheeled about and made for the city. Thus ended their first proud effort to sustain and complete the humiliation of King David. The hired troops on which they had leaned so much turned out utterly untrustworthy; and the wretched Ammonites found themselves *minus* their thousand talents, without victory, and without honour.

But their allies the Syrians were not disposed to yield without another conflict. Determined to do his utmost, Hadarezer, king of the Syrians of Zobah, sent across the Euphrates, and prevailed on their neighbours

there to join them in the effort to crush the power of David. That a very large number of these Mesopotamian Syrians responded to the invitation of Hadarezer is apparent from the number of the slain (ver. 18). The matter assumed so serious an aspect that David himself was now constrained to take the field, at the head of "all Israel." The Syrian troops were commanded by Shobach, who appears to have been a distinguished general. It must have been a death-struggle between the Syrian power and the power of David. But again the victory was with the Israelites, and among the slain were the men of seven hundred chariots, and forty thousand horsemen (1 Chron. xix. 18, "footmen"), along with Shobach, captain of the Syrian host. It must have been a most decisive victory, for after it took place all the states that had been tributary to Hadarezer transferred their allegiance to David. The Syrian power was completely broken; all help was withdrawn from the Ammonites, who were now left to bear the brunt of their quarrel alone. Single-handed, they had to look for the onset of the army which had so remarkably prevailed against all the power of Syria, and to answer to King David for the outrage they had perpetrated on his ambassadors. Very different must their feelings have been now from the time when they began to negotiate with Syria, and when, doubtless, they looked forward so confidently to the coming defeat and humiliation of King David.

It requires but a very little consideration to see that the wars which are so briefly recorded in this chapter must have been most serious and perilous undertakings. The record of them is so short, so unimpassioned, so simple, that many readers are disposed to think very little of them. But when we pause to think what it

was for the king of Israel to meet, on foreign soil, confederates so numerous, so powerful, and so familiar with warfare, we cannot but see that these were tremendous wars. They were fitted to try the faith as well as the courage of David and his people to the very utmost. In seeking dates for those psalms that picture a multitude of foes closing on the writer, and that record the exercises of his heart, from the insinuations of fear at the beginning to the triumph of trust and peace at the end, we commonly think only of two events in David's life,—the persecution of Saul and the insurrection of Absalom. But the Psalmist himself could probably have enumerated a dozen occasions when his danger and his need were as great as they were then. He must have passed through the same experience on these occasions as on the other two; and the language of the Psalms may often have as direct reference to the former as to the latter. We may understand, too, how the destruction of enemies became so prominent a petition in his prayers. What can a general desire and pray for, when he sees a hostile army, like a great engine of destruction, ready to dash against all that he holds dear, but that the engine may be shivered, deprived of all power of doing mischief —in other words, that the army may be destroyed? The imprecations in the Book of Psalms against his enemies must be viewed in this light. The military habit of the Psalmist's mind made him think only of the destruction of those who, in opposing him, opposed the cause of God. It ought not to be imputed as a crime to David that he did not rise high above a soldier's feelings; that he did not view things from the point of view of Christianity; that he was not a thousand years in advance of his age. The one outlet from the frightful

danger which these Syrian hordes brought to him and his people was that they should be destroyed. Our blessed Lord gave men another view when He said, "The Son of man is come not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." He familiarised us with other modes of conquest. When He appeared to Saul on the way to Damascus, and turned the persecutor into the chief of apostles, He showed that there are other ways than that of destruction for delivering His Church from its enemies. "I send thee to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." This commission to Saul gives us reason for praying, with reference to the most clever and destructive of the enemies of His Church, that by His Spirit He would meet them too, and turn them into other men. And not until this line of petition has been exhausted can we fall back in prayer on David's method. Only when their repentance and conversion have become hopeless are we entitled to pray God to destroy the grievous wolves that work such havoc in His flock.

CHAPTER XIV.

DAVID AND URIAH.

2 Samuel xi.

HOW ardently would most, if not all readers, of the life of David have wished that it had ended before this chapter! Its golden era has passed away, and what remains is little else than a chequered tale of crime and punishment. On former occasions, under the influence of strong and long-continued temptations, we have seen his faith give way and a spirit of dissimulation appear; but these were like spots on the sun, not greatly obscuring his general radiance. What we now encounter is not like a spot, but a horrid eclipse; it is not like a mere swelling of the face, but a bloated tumour that distorts the countenance and drains the body of its life-blood. To human wisdom it would have seemed far better had David's life ended now, so that no cause might have been given for the everlasting current of jeer and joke with which his fall has supplied the infidel. Often, when a great and good man is cut off in the midst of his days and of his usefulness, we are disposed to question the wisdom of the dispensation; but when we find ourselves disposed to wonder whether this might not have been better in the case of David, we may surely acquiesce in the ways of God.

If the composition of the Bible had been in human hands it would never have contained such a chapter as this. There is something quite remarkable in the fearless way in which it unveils the guilt of David; it is set forth in its nakedness, without the slightest attempt either to palliate or to excuse it; and the only statement in the whole record designed to characterise it is the quiet but terrible words with which the chapter ends—"But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." In the fearless march of providence we see many a proof of the courage of God. It is God alone that could have the fortitude to place in the Holy Book this foul story of sin and shame. He only could deliberately encounter the scorn which it has drawn down from every generation of ungodly men, the only wise God, who sees the end from the beginning, who can rise high above all the fears and objections of short-sighted men, and who can quiet every feeling of uneasiness on the part of His children with the sublime words, "Be still, and know that I am God."

The truth is, that though David's reputation would have been brighter had he died at this point of his career, the moral of his life, so to speak, would have been less complete. There was evidently a sensual element in his nature, as there is in so many men of warm, emotional temperament; and he does not appear to have been alive to the danger involved in it. It led him the more readily to avail himself of the toleration of polygamy, and to increase from time to time the number of his wives. Thus provision was made for the gratification of a disorderly lust, which, if he had lived like Abraham or Isaac, would have been kept back from all lawless excesses. And when evil desire has large scope for its exercise, instead of being satisfied it becomes

more greedy and more lawless. Now, this painful chapter of David's history is designed to show us what the final effect of this was in his case—what came ultimately of this habit of pampering the lust of the flesh. And verily, if any have ever been inclined to envy David's liberty, and think it hard that such a law of restraint binds them while he was permitted to do as he pleased, let them study in the latter part of his history the effects of this unhallowed indulgence; let them see his home robbed of its peace and joy, his heart lacerated by the misconduct of his children, his throne seized by his son, while he has to fly from his own Jerusalem; let them see him obliged to take the field against Absalom, and hear the air rent by his cries of anguish when Absalom is slain; let them think how even his deathbed was disturbed by the noise of revolt, and how legacies of blood had to be bequeathed to his successor almost with his dying breath,—and surely it will be seen that the license which bore such wretched fruits is not to be envied, and that, after all, the way even of royal transgressors is hard.

But a fall so violent as that of David does not occur all at once. It is generally preceded by a period of spiritual declension, and in all likelihood there was such an experience on his part. Nor is it very difficult to find the cause. For many years back David had enjoyed a most remarkable run of prosperity. His army had been victorious in every encounter; his power was recognized by many neighbouring states; immense riches flowed from every quarter to his capital; it seemed as if nothing could go wrong with him. When everything prospers to a man's hand, it is a short step to the conclusion that he can do nothing wrong. How many great men in the world have been spoiled

by success, and by unlimited, or even very great power! In how many hearts has the fallacy obtained a footing, that ordinary laws were not made for them, and that they did not need to regard them! David was no exception; he came to think of his will as the great directing force within his kingdom, the earthly consideration that should regulate all.

Then there was the absence of that very powerful stimulus, the pressure of distress around him, which had driven him formerly so close to God. His enemies had been defeated in every quarter, with the single exception of the Ammonites, a foe that could give him no anxiety; and he ceased to have a vivid sense of his reliance on God as his Shield. The pressure of trouble and anxiety that had made his prayers so earnest was now removed, and probably he had become somewhat remiss and formal in prayer. We little know how much influence our surroundings have on our spiritual life till some great change takes place in them; and then, perhaps, we come to see that the atmosphere of trial and difficulty which oppressed us so greatly was really the occasion to us of our highest strength and our greatest blessings.

And further, there was the fact that David was idle, at least without active occupation. Though it was the time for kings to go forth to battle, and though his presence with his army at Rabbah would have been a great help and encouragement to his soldiers, he was not there. He seems to have thought it not worth his while. Now that the Syrians had been defeated, there could be no difficulty with the Ammonites. At eveningtide he arose from off his bed and walked on the roof of his house. He was in that idle, listless mood in which one is most readily attracted by temptation, and

in which the lust of the flesh has its greatest power. And, as it has been remarked, "oft the sight of means to do ill makes ill deeds done." If any scruples arose in his conscience they were not regarded. To brush aside objections to anything on which he had set his heart was a process to which, in his great undertakings, he had been well accustomed; unhappily, he applies this rule when it is not applicable, and with the whole force of his nature rushes into temptation.

Never was there a case which showed more emphatically the dreadful chain of guilt to which a first act, apparently insignificant, may give rise. His first sin was allowing himself to be arrested to sinful intents by the beauty of Bathsheba. Had he, like Job, made a covenant with his eyes; had he resolved that when the idea of sin sought entrance into the imagination it should be sternly refused admission; had he, in a word, nipped the temptation in the bud, he would have been saved a world of agony and sin. But instead of repelling the idea he cherishes it. He makes inquiry concerning the woman. He brings her to his house. He uses his royal position and influence to break down the objections which she would have raised. He forgets what is due to the faithful soldier, who, employed in his service, is unable to guard the purity of his home. He forgets the solemn testimony of the law, which denounces death to both parties as the penalty of the sin. This is the first act of the tragedy.

Then follow his vain endeavours to conceal his crime, frustrated by the high self-control of Uriah. Yes, though David gets him intoxicated he cannot make a tool of him. Strange that this Hittite, this member of one of the seven nations of Canaan, whose inheritance was not a blessing but a curse, shows himself a paragon

in that self-command, the utter absence of which, in the favoured king of Israel, has plunged him so deeply in the mire. Thus ends the second act of the tragedy.

But the next is far the most awful. Uriah must be got rid of, not, however, openly, but by a cunning stratagem that shall make it seem as if his death were the result of the ordinary fortune of war. And to compass this David must take Joab into his confidence. To Joab, therefore, he writes a letter, indicating what is to be done to get rid of Uriah. Could David have descended to a lower depth? It was bad enough to compass the death of Uriah; it was mean enough to make him the bearer of the letter that gave directions for his death; but surely the climax of meanness and guilt was the writing of that letter. Do you remember, David, how shocked you were when Joab slew Abner? Do you remember your consternation at the thought that you might be held to approve of the murder? Do you remember how often you have wished that Joab were not so rough a man, that he had more gentleness, more piety, more concern for bloodshedding? And here are you making this Joab your confidant in sin, and your partner in murder, justifying all the wild work his sword has ever done, and causing him to believe that, in spite of all his holy pretensions David is just such a man as himself.

Surely it was a horrible sin—aggravated, too, in many ways. It was committed by the head of the nation, who was bound not only to discountenance sin in every form, but especially to protect the families and preserve the rights of the brave men who were exposing their lives in his service. And that head of the nation had been signally favoured by God, and had been exalted in room of one whose selfishness and godlessness

had caused him to be deposed from his dignity. Then there was the profession made by David of zeal for God's service and His law, his great enthusiasm in bringing up the ark to Jerusalem, his desire to build a temple, the character he had gained as a writer of sacred songs, and indeed as the great champion of religion in the nation. Further, there was the mature age at which he had now arrived, a period of life at which sobriety in the indulgence of the appetites is so justly and reasonably expected. And finally, there was the excellent character and the faithful services of Uriah, entitling him to the high rewards of his sovereign, rather than the cruel fate which David measured out to him—his home rifled and his life taken away.

How then, it may be asked, can the conduct of David be accounted for? The answer is simple enough—on the ground of original sin. Like the rest of us, he was born with proclivities to evil—to irregular desires craving unlawful indulgence. When divine grace takes possession of the heart it does not annihilate sinful tendencies, but overcomes them. It brings considerations to bear on the understanding, the conscience, and the heart, that incline and enable one to resist the solicitations of evil, and to yield one's self to the law of God. It turns this into a habit of the life. It gives one a sense of great peace and happiness in resisting the motions of sin, and doing the will of God. It makes it the deliberate purpose and desire of one's heart to be holy; it inspires one with the prayer, "Oh that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all Thy commandments."

But, meanwhile, the cravings of the old nature are not wholly destroyed. "The flesh lusteth against the

spirit, and the spirit lusteth against the flesh." It is as if two armies were in collision. The Christian who naturally has a tendency to sensuality may feel the craving for sinful gratification even when the general bent of his nature is in favour of full compliance with the will of God. In some natures, especially strong natures, both the old man and the new possess unusual vehemence; the rebellious energisings of the old are held in check by the still more resolute vigour of the new; but if it so happen that the opposition of the new man to the old is relaxed or abated, then the outbreak of corruption will probably be on a fearful scale. Thus it was in David's nature. The sensual craving, the law of sin in his members, was strong; but the law of grace, inclining him to give himself up to the will of God, was stronger, and usually kept him right. There was an extraordinary activity and energy of character about him; he never did things slowly, tremblingly, timidly; the wellsprings of life were full, and gushed out in copious currents; in whatever direction they might flow, they were sure to flow with power. But at this time the energy of the new nature was suffering a sad abatement; the considerations that should have led him to conform to God's law had lost much of their usual power. Fellowship with the Fountain of life was interrupted; the old nature found itself free from its habitual restraint, and its stream came out with the vehemence of a liberated torrent. It would be quite unfair to judge David on this occasion as if he had been one of those feeble creatures who, as they seldom rise to the heights of excellence, seldom sink to the depths of daring sin.

We make these remarks simply to account for a fact, and by no means to excuse a crime. Men are liable to ask, when they read of such sins done by good men,

Were they really good men? Can that be genuine goodness which leaves a man liable to do such deeds of wickedness? If so, wherein are your so-called good men better than other men? We reply, They are better than other men in this,—and David was better than other men in this,—that the deepest and most deliberate desire of their hearts is to do as God requires, and to be holy as God is holy. This is their habitual aim and desire; and in this they are in the main successful. If this be not one's habitual aim, and if in this he do not habitually succeed, he can have no real claim to be counted a good man. Such is the doctrine of the Apostle in the seventh chapter of the Romans. Any one who reads that chapter in connection with the narrative of David's fall can have little doubt that it is the experience of the new man that the Apostle is describing. The habitual attitude of the heart is given in the striking words, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." I see how good God's law is; how excellent is the stringent restraint it lays on all that is loose and irregular, how beautiful the life which is cast in its mould. But for all that, I feel in me the motions of desire for unlawful gratifications, I feel a craving for the pleasures of sin. "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." But how does the Apostle treat this feeling? Does he say, "I am a human creature, and, having these desires, I may and I must gratify them"? Far from it! He deplores the fact, and he cries for deliverance. "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And his only hope of deliverance is in Him whom he calls his Saviour. "I thank God through Jesus Christ our

Lord." In the case of David, the law of sin in his members prevailed for the time over the new law, the law of his mind, and it plunged him into a state which might well have led him too to say, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?"

And now we begin to understand why this supremely horrible transaction should be given in the Bible, and given at such length. It bears the character of a beacon, warning the mariner against some of the most deceitful and perilous rocks that are to be found in all the sea of life. First of all, it shows the danger of interrupting, however briefly, the duty of watching and praying, lest you enter into temptation. It is at your peril to discontinue earnest daily communion with God, especially when the evils are removed that first drove you to seek His aid. An hour's sleep may leave Samson at the mercy of Delilah, and when he awakes his strength is gone. Further, it affords a sad proof of the danger of dallying with sin even in thought. Admit sin within the precincts of the imagination, and there is the utmost danger of its ultimately mastering the soul. The outposts of the spiritual garrison should be so placed as to protect even the thoughts, and the moment the enemy is discovered there the alarm should be given and the fight begun. It is a serious moment when the young man admits a polluted thought to his heart, and pursues it even in reverie. The door is opened to a dangerous brood. And everything that excites sensual feeling, be it songs, jests, pictures, books of a lascivious character, all tends to enslave and pollute the soul, till at length it is saturated with impurity, and cannot escape the wretched thraldom. And further, this narrative shows us what moral havoc and ruin may be wrought by the toleration and grati-

fication of a single sinful desire. You may contend vigorously against ninety-and-nine forms of sin, but if you yield to the hundredth the consequences will be deadly. You may fling away a whole box of matches, but if you retain one it is quite sufficient to set fire to your house. A single soldier finding his way into a garrison may open the gates to the whole besieging army. One sin leads on to another and another, especially if the first be a sin which it is desirable to conceal. Falsehood and cunning, and even treachery, are employed to promote concealment; unprincipled accomplices are called in; the failure of one contrivance leads to other contrivances more sinful and more desperate. If there is a being on earth more to be pitied than another it is the man who has got into this labyrinth. What a contrast his perplexed feverish agitation to the calm peace of the straightforward Christian! "He that walketh uprightly walketh surely; but he that perverteth his way shall be known."

Never let any one read this chapter of 2 Samuel without paying the profoundest regard to its closing words—"But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord." In that "but" lies a whole world of meaning.

CHAPTER XV.

DAVID AND NATHAN.

2 SAMUEL xii. 1-12; 26-31.

IT is often the method of the writers of Scripture, when the stream of public history has been broken by a private or personal incident, to complete at once the incident, and then go back to the principal history, resuming it at the point at which it was interrupted. In this way it sometimes happens (as we have already seen) that earlier events are recorded at a later part of the narrative than the natural order would imply. In the course of the narrative of David's war with Ammon, the incident of his sin with Bathsheba presents itself. In accordance with the method referred to, that incident is recorded straight on to its very close, including the birth of Bathsheba's second son, which must have occurred at least two years later. That being concluded, the history of the war with Ammon is resumed at the point at which it was broken off. We are not to suppose, as many have done, that the events recorded in the concluding verses of this chapter (vv. 26-31) happened later than those recorded immediately before. This would imply that the siege of Rabbah lasted for two or three years—a supposition hardly to be entertained; for Joab was besieging it when David first saw Bathsheba, and there is no reason to suppose that a

people like the Ammonites would be able to hold the mere outworks of the city for two or three whole years against such an army as David's and such a commander as Joab. It seems far more likely that Joab's first success against Rabbah was gained soon after the death of Uriah, and that his message to David to come and take the citadel in person was sent not long after the message that announced Uriah's death.

In that case the order of events would be as follows: After the death of Uriah, Joab prepares for an assault on Rabbah. Meanwhile, at Jerusalem, Bathsheba goes through the form of mourning for her husband, and when the usual days of mourning are over David hastily sends for her and makes her his wife. Next comes a message from Joab that he has succeeded in taking the city of waters, and that only the citadel remains to be taken, for which purpose he urges David to come himself with additional forces, and thereby gain the honour of conquering the place. It rather surprises one to find Joab declining an honour for himself, as it also surprises us to find David going to reap what another had sowed. David, however, goes with "all the people," and is successful, and after disposing of the Ammonites he returns to Jerusalem. Soon after Bathsheba's child is born; then Nathan goes to David and gives him the message that lays him in the dust. This is not only the most natural order for the events, but it agrees best with the spirit of the narrative. The cruelties practised by David on the Ammonites send a thrill of horror through us as we read them. No doubt they deserved a severe chastisement; the original offence was an outrage on every right feeling, an outrage on the law of nations, a gratuitous and contemptuous insult; and in bringing these vast Syrian armies

into the field they had subjected even the victorious Israelites to grievous suffering and loss, in toil, in money, and in lives.

Attempts have been made to explain away the severities inflicted on the Ammonites, but it is impossible to explain away a plain historical narrative. It was the manner of victorious warriors in those countries to steel their hearts against all compassion toward captive foes, and David, kind-hearted though he was, did the same. And if it be said that surely his religion, if it were religion of the right kind, ought to have made him more compassionate, we reply that at this period his religion was in a state of collapse. When his religion was in a healthy and active state, it showed itself in the first place by his regard for the honour of God, for whose ark he provided a resting-place, and in whose honour he proposed to build a temple. Love to God was accompanied by love to man, exhibited in his efforts to show kindness to the house of Saul for the sake of Jonathan, and to Hanun for the sake of Nahash. But now the picture is reversed; he falls into a cold state of heart toward God, and in connection with that declension we mark a more than usually severe punishment inflicted on his enemies. Just as the leaves first become yellow and finally drop from the tree in autumn, when the juices that fed them begin to fail, so the kindly actions that had marked the better periods of his life first fail, then turn to deeds of cruelty when that Holy Spirit, who is the fountain of all goodness, being resisted and grieved by him, withholds His living power.

In the whole transaction at Rabbah David shows poorly. It is not like him to be roused to an enterprise by an appeal to his love of fame; he might have left Joab to complete the conquest and enjoy the honour

which his sword had substantially won. It is not like him to go through the ceremony of being crowned with the crown of the king of Ammon, as if it were a great thing to have so precious a diadem on his head. Above all, it is not like him to show so terrible a spirit in disposing of his prisoners of war. But all this is quite likely to have happened if he had not yet come to repentance for his sin. When a man's conscience is ill at ease, his temper is commonly irritable. Unhappy in his inmost soul, he is in the temper that most easily becomes savage when provoked. No one can imagine that David's conscience was at rest. He must have had that restless feeling which every good man experiences after doing a wrong act, before coming to a clear apprehension of it; he must have been eager to escape from himself, and Joab's request to him to come to Rabbah and end the war must have been very opportune. In the excitement of war he would escape for a time the pursuit of his conscience; but he would be restless and irritable, and disposed to drive out of his way, in the most unceremonious manner, whoever or whatever should cross his path.

We now return with him to Jerusalem. He had added another to his long list of illustrious victories, and he had carried to the capital another vast store of spoil. The public attention would be thoroughly occupied with these brilliant events; and a king entering his capital at the head of his victorious troops, and followed by waggons laden with public treasure, need not fear a harsh construction on his private actions. The fate of Uriah might excite little notice; the affair of Bathsheba would soon blow over. The brilliant victory that had terminated the war seemed at the same time to have extricated the king from a personal scandal. David

might flatter himself that all would now be peace and quiet, and that the waters of oblivion would gather over that ugly business of Uriah.

"But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord."

"And the Lord sent Nathan unto David."

Slowly, sadly, silently the prophet bends his steps to the palace. Anxiously and painfully he prepares himself for the most distressing task a prophet of the Lord ever had to go through. He has to convey God's reproof to the king; he has to reprove one from whom, doubtless, he has received many an impulse towards all that is high and holy. Very happily he clothes his message in the Eastern garb of parable. He puts his parable in such life-like form that the king has no suspicion of its real character. The rich robber that spared his own flocks and herds to feed the traveller, and stole the poor man's ewe lamb, is a real flesh-and-blood criminal to him. And the deed is so dastardly, its heartlessness is so atrocious, that it is not enough to enforce against such a wretch the ordinary law of fourfold restitution; in the exercise of his high prerogative the king pronounces a sentence of death upon the ruffian, and confirms it with the solemnity of an oath—"The man that hath done this thing shall surely die." The flash of indignation is yet in his eye, the flush of resentment is still on his brow, when the prophet with calm voice and piercing eye utters the solemn words, "Thou art the man!" Thou, great king of Israel, art the robber, the ruffian, condemned by thine own voice to the death of the worst malefactor! "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; and I gave thee thy master's house, and thy

master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little I would moreover have given thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon."

It is not difficult to fancy the look of the king as the prophet delivered his message—how at first when he said, "Thou art the man," he would gaze at him eagerly and wistfully, like one at a loss to divine his meaning; and then, as the prophet proceeded to apply his parable, how, conscience-stricken, his expression would change to one of horror and agony; how the deeds of the last twelve months would glare in all their infamous baseness upon him, and outraged Justice, with a hundred glittering swords, would seem all impatient to devour him.

It is no mere imagination that, in a moment, the mind may be so quickened as to embrace the actions of a long period; and that with equal suddenness the moral aspect of them may be completely changed. There are moments when the powers of the mind as well as those of the body are so stimulated as to become capable of exertions undreamt of before. The dumb prince, in ancient history, who all his life had never spoken a word, but found the power of speech when he saw a sword raised to cut down his father, showed how danger could stimulate the organs of the body. The sudden change in David's feeling now, like the sudden change in Saul's on the way to Damascus, showed what electric rapidity may be communicated to the operations of the soul. It showed too what unseen and irresistible agencies of conviction and condemnation

the great Judge can bring into play when it is His will to do so. As the steam hammer may be so adjusted as either to break a nutshell without injuring the kernel, or crush a block of quartz to powder, so the Spirit of God can range, in His effects on the conscience, between the mildest feeling of uneasiness and the bitterest agony of remorse. "When He is come," said our blessed Lord, "He shall reprove the world of sin." How helpless men are under His operation! How utterly was David prostrated! How were the multitudes brought down on the day of Pentecost! Is there any petition we more need to press than that the Spirit be poured out to convince of sin, whether as it regards ourselves or the world? Is it not true that the great want of the Church the want of is a sense of sin, so that confession and humiliation are become rare, and our very theology is emasculated, because, where there is little sense of sin, there can be little appreciation of redemption? And is not a sense of sin that which would bring a careless world to itself, and make it deal earnestly with God's gracious offers? How striking is the effect ascribed by the prophet Zechariah to that pouring of the spirit of grace and supplication upon the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, when "they shall look on Him whom they have pierced, and shall mourn for Him as one mourneth for an only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." Would that our whole hearts went out in those invocations of the Spirit which we often sing, but alas! so very tamely—

"Come, Holy Spirit, come,
Let Thy bright beams arise;
Dispel the darkness from our minds,
And open all our eyes.

"Convince us of our sin,
Lead us to Jesus' blood,
And kindle in our breast the flame
Of never-dying love."

We cannot pass from this aspect of David's case without marking the terrible power of self-deception. Nothing blinds men so much to the real character of a sin as the fact that it is their own. Let it be presented to them in the light of another man's sin, and they are shocked. It is easy for one's self-love to weave a veil of fair embroidery, and cast it over those deeds about which one is somewhat uncomfortable. It is easy to devise for ourselves this excuse and that, and lay stress on one excuse and another that may lessen the appearance of criminality. But nothing is more to be deprecated, nothing more to be deplored, than success in that very process. Happy for you if a Nathan is sent to you in time to tear to rags your elaborate embroidery, and lay bare the essential vileness of your deed! Happy for you if your conscience is made to assert its authority, and cry to you, with its awful voice, "Thou art the man!" For if you live and die in your fool's paradise, excusing every sin, and saying peace, peace, when there is no peace, there is nothing for you but the rude awakening of the day of judgment, when the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies!

After Nathan had exposed the sin of David he proceeded to declare his sentence. It was not a sentence of death, in the ordinary sense of the term, but it was a sentence of death in a sense even more difficult to bear. It consisted of three things—first, the sword should never depart from his house; second, out of his own house evil should be raised against him, and a dishonoured harem should show the nature and

extent of the humiliation that would come upon him; and thirdly, a public exposure should thus be made of his sin, so that he would stand in the pillory of Divine rebuke, and in the shame which it entailed, before all Israel, and before the sun. When David confessed his sin, Nathan told him that the Lord had graciously forgiven it, but at the same time a special chastisement was to mark how concerned God was for the fact that by his sin he had caused the enemy to blaspheme—the child born of Bathsheba was to die.

Reserving this last part of the sentence and David's bearing in connection with it for future consideration, let us give attention to the first portion of his retribution. "The sword shall never depart from thy house." Here we find a great principle in the moral government of God,—correspondence between an offence and its retribution. Of this many instances occur in the Old Testament. Jacob deceived his father; he was deceived by his own sons. Lot made a worldly choice; in the world's ruin he was overwhelmed. So David having slain Uriah with the sword, the sword was never to depart from him. He had robbed Uriah of his wife; his neighbours would in like manner rob and dishonour him. He had disturbed the purity of the family relation; his own house was to become a den of pollution. He had mingled deceit and treachery with his actions; deceit and treachery would be practised towards him. What a sad and ominous prospect! Men naturally look for peace in old age; the evening of life is expected to be calm. But for him there was to be no calm; and his trial was to fall on the tenderest part of his nature. He had a strong affection for his children; in that very feeling he was to be wounded, and that, too, all his life long. Oh let not any suppose that,

because God's children are saved by His mercy from eternal punishment, it is a light thing for them to despise the commandments of the Lord! "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee; know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that thy fear is not in Me, saith the Lord of hosts."

Pre-eminent in its bitterness was that part of David's retribution which made his own house the source from which his bitterest trials and humiliations should arise. For the most part, it is in extreme cases only that parents have to encounter this trial. It is only in the wickedest households, and in households for the most part where the passions are roused to madness by drink, that the hand of the child is raised against his father to wound and dishonour him. It was a terrible humiliation to the king of Israel to have to bear this doom, and especially to that king of Israel who in many ways bore so close a resemblance to the promised Seed, who was indeed to be the progenitor of that Seed, so that when Messiah came He should be called "the Son of David." Alas! the glory of this distinction was to be sadly tarnished. "Son of David" was to be a very equivocal title, according to the character of the individual who should bear it. In one case it would denote the very climax of honour; in another, the depth of humiliation. Yes, that household of David's would reek with foul lusts and unnatural crimes. From the bosom of that home where, under other circumstances, it would have been so natural to look for model children, pure, affectionate, and dutiful, there would come forth monsters of lust and monsters of ambition, whose deeds of infamy would hardly find

a parallel in the annals of the nation! In the breasts of some of these royal children the devil would find a seat where he might plan and execute the most unnatural crimes. And that city of Jerusalem, which he had rescued from the Jebusites, consecrated as God's dwelling-place, and built and adorned with the spoils which the king had taken in many a well-fought field, would turn against him in his old age, and force him to fly wherever a refuge could be found as homeless, and nearly as destitute, as in the days of his youth when he fled from Saul!

And lastly, his retribution was to be public. He had done his part secretly, but God would do His part openly. There was not a man or woman in all Israel but would see these judgments coming on a king who had outraged his royal position and his royal prerogatives. How could he ever go in and out happily among them again? How could he be sure, when he met any of them, that they were not thinking of his crime, and condemning him in their hearts? How could he meet the hardly suppressed scowl of every Hittite, that would recall his treatment of their faithful kinsman? What a burden would he carry ever after, he that used to wear such a frank and honest and kindly look, that was so affable to all that sought his counsel, and so tender-hearted to all that were in trouble! And what outlet could he find out of all this misery? There was but one he could think of. If only God would forgive him; if He, whose mercy was in the heavens, would but receive him again of His infinite condescension into His fellowship, and vouchsafe to him that grace which was not the fruit of man's deserving, but, as its very name implied, of God's unbounded goodness, then might his soul return again to its quiet rest, though life could never

be to him what it was before. And this, as we shall presently see, is what he set himself very earnestly to seek, and what of God's mercy he was permitted to find. O sinner, if thou hast strayed like a lost sheep, and plunged into the very depths of sin, know that all is not lost with thee! There is one way yet open to peace, if not to joy. Amid the ten thousand times ten thousand voices that condemn thee, there is one voice of love that comes from heaven and says, "Return unto Me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord."

CHAPTER XVI.

PENITENCE AND CHASTISEMENT.

2 Samuel xii. 13—25.

WHEN Nathan ended his message, plainly and strongly though he had spoken, David indicated no irritation, made no complaint against the prophet, but simply and humbly confessed—"I have sinned." It is so common for men to be offended when a servant of God remonstrates with them, and to impute their interference to an unworthy motive, and to the desire of some one to hurt and humiliate them, that it is refreshing to find a great king receiving the rebuke of the Lord's servant in a spirit of profound humility and frank confession. Very different was the experience of John the Baptist when he remonstrated with Herod. Very different was the experience of the famous Chrysostom when he rebuked the emperor and empress for conduct unworthy of Christians. Very different has been the experience of many a faithful minister in a humbler sphere, when, constrained by a sense of duty, he has gone to some man of influence in his flock, and spoken seriously to him of sins which bring a reproach on the name of Christ. Often it has cost the faithful man days and nights of pain; girding himself for the duty has been like preparing for martyrdom; and it has been really martyrdom when he has had to

bear the long malignant enmity of the man whom he rebuked. However vile the conduct of David may have been, it is one thing in his favour that he receives his rebuke with perfect humility and submission; he makes no attempt to palliate his conduct either before God or man; but sums up his whole feeling in these expressive words, "I have sinned against the Lord."

To this frank acknowledgment Nathan replied that the Lord had put away his sin, so that he would not undergo the punishment of death. It was his own judgment that the miscreant who had stolen the ewe lamb should die, and as that proved to be himself, it indicated the punishment that was due to him. That punishment, however, the Lord, in the exercise of His clemency, had been pleased to remit. But a palpable proof of His displeasure was to be given in another way—the child of Bathsheba was to die. It was to become, as it were, the scapegoat for its father. In those times father and child were counted so much one that the offence of the one was often visited on both. When Achan stole the spoil at Jericho, not only he himself, but his whole family, shared his sentence of death. In this case of David the father was to escape, but the child was to die. It may seem hard, and barely just. But death to the child, though in form a punishment, might prove to be great gain. It might mean transference to a higher and brighter state of existence. It might mean escape from a life full of sorrows and perils to the world where there is no more pain, nor sorrow, nor death, because the former things are passed away.

We cannot pass from the consideration of David's great penitence for his sin without dwelling a little more on some of its features. It is in the fifty-first

Psalm that the working of his soul is best unfolded to us. No doubt it has been strongly urged by certain modern critics that that psalm is not David's at all; that it belongs to some other period, as the last verse but one indicates, when the walls of Jerusalem were in ruins; —most likely the period of the Captivity. But even if we should have to say of the last two verses that they must have been added at another time, we cannot but hold the psalm to be the outpouring of David's soul, and not the expression of the penitence of the nation at large. If ever psalm was the expression of the feelings of an individual it is this one. And if ever psalm was appropriate to King David it is this one. For the one thing which is uppermost in the soul of the writer is his personal relation to God. The one thing that he values, and for which all other things are counted but dung, is friendly intercourse with God. This sin no doubt has had many other atrocious effects, but the terrible thing is that it has broken the link that bound him to God, it has cut off all the blessed things that come by that channel, it has made him an outcast from Him whose lovingkindness is better than life. Without God's favour life is but misery. He can do no good to man; he can do no service to God. It is a rare thing even for good men to have such a profound sense of the blessedness of God's favour. David was one of those who had it in the profoundest degree; and as the fifty-first Psalm is full of it, as it forms the very soul of its pleadings, we cannot doubt that it was a psalm of David.

The humiliation of the Psalmist before God is very profound, very thorough. His case is one for simple mercy; he has not the shadow of a plea in self-defence. His sin is in every aspect atrocious. It is the product

of one so vile that he may be said to have been shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin. The aspect of it as sin against God is so overwhelming that it absorbs the other aspect—the sin against man. Not but that he has sinned against man too, but it is the sin against God that is so awful, so overwhelming.

Yet, if his sin abounds, the Psalmist feels that God's grace abounds much more. He has the highest sense of the excellence and the multitude of God's loving-kindnesses. Man can never make himself so odious as to be beyond the Divine compassion. He can never become so guilty as to be beyond the Divine forgiveness. "Blot out my transgressions," sobs David, knowing that it can be done. "Purge me with hyssop," he cries, "and I *shall* be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than the snow. Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me."

But this is not all; it is far from all. He pleads most plaintively for the restoration of God's friendship. "Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me,"—for that would be hell; "Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation, and uphold me with Thy free Spirit,"—for that is heaven. And, with the renewed sense of God's love and grace, there would come a renewed power to serve God and be useful to men. "Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto Thee. O Lord, open Thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise." Deprive me not for ever of Thy friendship, for then life would be but darkness and anguish; depose me not for ever from Thy ministry, continue to me yet the honour and the privilege of converting sinners unto Thee. Of the sacrifices of the law it was needless to think, as if they were

adequate to purge away so overwhelming a sin. "Thou desirest not sacrifice, else I would give it: Thou delightest not in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."

With all his consciousness of sin, David has yet a profound faith in God's mercy, and he is forgiven. But as we have seen, the Divine displeasure against him is to be openly manifested in another form, because, in addition to his personal sin, he has given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.

This is an aggravation of guilt which only God's children can commit. And it is an aggravation of a most distressing kind, enough surely to warn off every Christian from vile self-indulgence. The blasphemy to which David had given occasion was that which denies the reality of God's work in the souls of His people. It denies that they are better than others. They only make more pretence, but that pretence is hollow, if not hypocritical. There is no such thing as a special work of the Holy Ghost in them, and therefore there is no reason why any one should seek to be converted, or why he should implore the special grace of the Spirit of God. Alas! how true it is that when any one who occupies a conspicuous place in the Church of God breaks down, such sneers are sure to be discharged on every side! What a keen eye the world has for the inconsistencies of Christians! With what remorseless severity does it come down on them when they fall into these inconsistencies! Sins that would hardly be thought of if committed by others,—what a serious aspect they assume when committed by them! Had it been Nebuchadnezzar, for example, that treated Uriah as

David did, who would have thought of it a second time? What else could you expect of Nebuchadnezzar? Let a Christian society or any other Christian body be guilty of a scandal, how do the worldly newspapers fasten on it like treasure-trove, and exult over their humbled victim, like Red Indians dancing their war dances and flourishing their tomahawks over some miserable prisoner. The scorn is very bitter, and sometimes it is very unjust; yet perhaps it has on the whole a wholesome effect, just because it stimulates vigilance and carefulness on the part of the Church. But the worst of the case is, that on the part of unbelievers it stimulates that blasphemy which is alike dishonouring to God and pernicious to man. Virtually this blasphemy denies the whole work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men. It denies the reality of any supernatural agency of the Spirit in one more than in all. And denying the work of the Spirit, it makes men careless about the Spirit; it neutralises the solemn words of Christ, "Ye must be born again." It throws back the kingdom of God, and it turns back many a pilgrim who had been thinking seriously of beginning the journey to the heavenly city, because he is now uncertain whether such a city exists at all.

Hardly has Nathan left the king's house when the child begins to sicken, and the sickness becomes very great. We should have expected that David would be concerned and distressed, but hardly to the degree which his distress attained. In the intensity of his anxiety and grief there is something remarkable. A new-born infant could scarcely have taken that mysterious hold on a father's heart which a little time is commonly required to develop, but which, once it is there, makes the loss even of a little child a grievous

blow, and leaves the heart sick and sore for many a day. But there is something in an infant's agony which unmans the strongest heart, especially when it comes in convulsive fits that no skill can allay. And should one, in addition, be tortured with the conviction that the child was suffering on one's own account, one's distress might well be overpowering. And this was David's feeling. His sin was ever before him. As he saw that suffering infant he must have felt as if the stripes that should have fallen on him were tearing the poor babe's tender frame, and crushing him with undeserved suffering. Even in ordinary cases, it is a mysterious thing to see an infant in mortal agony. It is solemnizing to think that the one member of the family who has committed no actual sin should be the first to reap the deadly wages of sin. It leads us to think of mankind as one tree of many branches; and when the wintry frost begins to prevail it is the youngest and tenderest branchlets that first droop and die. Oh! how careful should those in mature years be, and especially parents, lest by their sins they bring down a retribution which shall fall first on their children, and perhaps the youngest and most innocent of all! Yet how often do we see the children suffering for the sins of their parents, and suffering in a way which, in this life at least, admits of no right remedy! In that "bitter cry of outcast London," which fell some years ago on the ears of the country, by far the most distressing note was the cry of infants abandoned by drunken parents before they could well walk, or living with them in hovels where blows and curses came in place of food and clothing and kindness—children brought up without aught of the sunshine of love, every tender feeling nipped and shrivelled in the very bud by the

frost of bitter, brutal cruelty. And if in ordinary families children are not made to suffer so palpably for their parents' sins, yet suffer they do in many ways sufficiently serious. Wherever there is a bad example, wherever there is a laxity of principle, wherever God is dishonoured, the sin reacts upon the children. Their moral texture is relaxed; they learn to trifle with sin, and, trifling with sin, to disbelieve in the retribution for sin. And where conscience has not been altogether destroyed in the parent, and remorse for sin begins to prevail, and retribution to come, it is not what he has to suffer in his own person that he feels most deeply, but what has to be borne and suffered by his children. Does any one ask why God has constituted society so that the innocent are thus implicated in the sin of the guilty? The answer is, that this arises not from God's constitution, but from man's perversion of it. Why, we may ask, do men subvert God's moral order? Why do they break down His fences and embankments, and, contrary to the Divine plan, let ruinous streams pour their destructive waters into their homes and enclosures? If the human race had preserved from the beginning the constitution which God gave them, obeyed His law both individually and as a social body, such things would not have been. But reckless man, in his eagerness to have his own way, disregards the Divine arrangement, and plunges himself and his family into the depths of woe.

There is something even beyond this, however, that arrests our notice in the behaviour of David. Though Nathan had said that the child would die, he set himself most earnestly, by prayer and fasting, to get God to spare him. Was this not a strange proceeding? It could be justified only on the supposition that the

Divine judgment was modified by an unexpressed condition that, if David should humble himself in true repentance, it would not have to be inflicted. Anyhow, we see him throwing his whole soul into these exercises: engaging in them so earnestly that he took no regular food, and in place of the royal bed he was content to lie upon the earth. His earnestness in this was well fitted to show the difference between a religious service gone through with becoming reverence, because it is the proper thing to do, and the service of one who has a definite end in view, who seeks a definite blessing, and who wrestles with God to obtain it. But David had no valid ground for expecting that, even if he should repent, God would avert the judgment from the child; indeed, the reason assigned for it showed the contrary—because he had given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.

And so, after a very weary and dismal week, the child died. But instead of abandoning himself to a tumult of distress when this event took place, he altogether changed his demeanour. His spirit became calm, "he arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and he came into the house of the Lord and worshipped; then he came to his own house, and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat." It seemed to his servants a strange proceeding. The answer of David showed that there was a rational purpose in it. So long as he thought it possible that the child's life might be spared, he not only continued to pray to that effect, but he did everything to prevent his attention from being turned to anything else, he did everything to concentrate his soul on that one object, and to let it appear to God how thoroughly it occupied his mind. The death of

the child showed that it was not God's will to grant his petition, notwithstanding his deep repentance and earnest prayer and fasting. All suspense was now at an end, and, therefore, all reason for continuing to fast and pray. For David to abandon himself to the wailings of aggravated grief at this moment would have been highly wrong. It would have been to quarrel with the will of God. It would have been to challenge God's right to view the child as one with its father, and treat it accordingly.

And there was yet another reason. If his heart still yearned on the child, the re-union was not impossible, though it could not take place in this life. "I shall go to him, but he shall not return unto me." The glimpse of the future expressed in these words is touching and beautiful. The relation between David and that little child is not ended. Though the mortal remains shall soon crumble, father and child are not yet done with one another. But their meeting is not to be in this world. Meet again they certainly shall, but "I shall go to him, and he shall not return to me."

And this glimpse of the future relation of parent and child, separated here by the hand of death, has ever proved most comforting to bereaved Christian hearts. Very touching and very comforting it is to light on this bright view of the future at so early a period of Old Testament history. Words cannot express the desolation of heart which such bereavements cause. When Rachel is weeping for her children she cannot be comforted if she thinks they are not. But a new light breaks on her desolate heart when she is assured that she may go to them, though they shall not return to her. Blessed, truly, are the dead who die in the Lord, and, however painful the stroke that removed them,

blessed are their surviving friends. Ye shall go to them, though they shall not return to you. How you are to recognise them, how you are to commune with them, in what place they shall be, in what condition of consciousness, you cannot tell; but "you shall go to them;" the separation shall be but temporary, and who can conceive the joy of re-union, re-union never to be broken by separation for evermore?

One other fact we must notice ere passing from the record of David's confession and chastisement,—the moral courage which he showed in delivering the fifty-first Psalm to the chief musician, and thus helping to keep alive in his own generation and for all time coming the memory of his trespass. Most men would have thought how the ugly transaction might most effectually be buried, and would have tried to put their best face on it before their people. Not so David. He was willing that his people and all posterity should see him the atrocious transgressor he was—let them think of him as they pleased. He saw that this everlasting exposure of his vileness was essential towards extracting from the miserable transaction such salutary lessons as it might be capable of yielding. With a wonderful effort of magnanimity, he resolved to place himself in the pillory of public shame, to expose his memory to all the foul treatment which the scoffers and libertines of every after-age might think fit to heap on it. It is unjust to David, when unbelievers rail against him for his sin in the matter of Uriah, to overlook the fact that the first public record of the transaction came from his own pen, and was delivered to the chief musician, for public use. Infidels may scoff, but this narrative will be a standing proof that the foolishness of God is wiser than men. The view given to God's servants of

the weakness and deceitfulness of their hearts; the warning against dallying with the first movements of sin; the sight of the misery which follows in its wake; the encouragement which the convicted sinner has to humble himself before God; the impulse given to penitential feeling; the hope of mercy awakened in the breasts of the despairing; the softer, humbler, holier walk when pardon has been got and peace restored,—such lessons as these, afforded in every age by this narrative, will render it to thoughtful hearts a constant ground for magnifying God. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!"

CHAPTER XVII.

ABSALOM AND AMNON.

2 Samuel xiii. 1—37.

A LIVING sorrow, says the proverb, is worse than a dead. The dead sorrow had been very grievous to David; what the living sorrow, of which this chapter tells us, must have been, we cannot conceive. It is his own disorderly lusts, reappearing in his sons, that are the source of this new tragedy. It is often useful for parents to ask whether they would like to see their children doing what they allow in themselves; and in many cases the answer is an emphatic "No." David is now doomed to see his children following his own evil example, only with added circumstances of atrocity. Adultery and murder had been introduced by him into the palace; when he is done with them they remain to be handled by his sons.

It is a very repulsive picture of sensuality that this chapter presents. One would suppose that Amnon and Absalom had been accustomed to the wild orgies of pagan idolatry. Nathan had rebuked David because he had given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. He had afforded them a pretext for denying the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and sanctification, and for affirming that so-called holy men were just like the rest of mankind. This in God's eyes was a grievous offence. Amnon and Absalom are now

guilty of the same offence in another form, because they afford a pretext for ungodly men to say that the families of holy men are no better—perhaps that they are worse —than other families. But as David himself in the matter of Uriah is an exception to the ordinary lives of godly men, so his home is an exception to the ordinary tone and spirit of religious households. Happily we are met with a very different ideal when we look behind the scenes into the better class of Christian homes, whether high or low. It is a beautiful picture of the Christian home, according to the Christian ideal, we find, for example, in Milton's *Comus*—pure brothers, admiring a dear sister's purity, and jealous lest, alone in the world, she should fall in the way of any of those bloated monsters that would drag an angel into their filthy sty. Commend us to those homes where brothers and sisters, sharing many a game, and with still greater intimacy pouring into each other's ears their inner thoughts and feelings, never utter a jest, or word, or allusion with the slightest taint of indelicacy, and love and honour each other with all the higher affection that none of them has ever been near the haunts of pollution. It is easy to ridicule innocence, to scoff at young men who "flee youthful lusts;" yet who will say that the youth who is steeped in fashionable sensuality is worthy to be the brother and companion of pure-minded maidens, or that his breath will not contaminate the atmosphere of their home? What easy victories Belial gains over many! How easily he persuades them that vice is manly, that impurity is grand, that the pig's sty is a delightful place to lie down in! How easily he induces them to lay snares for female chastity, and put the devil's mask on woman's soul! But "God is not mocked; whatsoever a man

soweth, that shall he also reap; for he that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, while he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

In Scripture some men have very short biographies; Amnon is one of these. And, like Cain, all that is recorded of him has the mark of infamy. We can easily understand that it was a great disaster to him to be a king's son. To have his position in life determined and all his wants supplied without an effort on his part; to be surrounded by such plenty that the wholesome necessity of denying himself was unknown, and whatever he fancied was at once obtained; to be so accustomed to indulge his legitimate feelings that when illegitimate desires rose up it seemed but natural that they too should be gratified; thus to be led on in the evil ways of sensual pleasure till his appetite became at once bloated and irrepressible; to be surrounded by parasites and flatterers, that would make a point of never crossing him nor uttering a disagreeable word, but constantly encouraging his tastes,—all this was extremely dangerous. And when his father had set him the example, it was hardly possible he would avoid the snare. There is every reason to believe that before he is presented to us in this chapter he was already steeped in sensuality. It was his misfortune to have a friend, Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, David's brother, "a very subtil man," who at heart must have been as great a profligate as himself. For if Jonadab had been anything but a profligate, Amnon would never have confided to him his odious desire with reference to his half-sister, and Jonadab would never have given him the advice that he did. What a blessing to Amnon, at this stage of the tragedy, would have been the faithful

advice of an honest friend—one who would have had the courage to declare the infamy of his proposal, and who would have so placed it in the light of truth that it would have shocked and horrified even Amnon himself! In reality, the friend was more guilty than the culprit. The one was blinded by passion; the other was self-possessed and cool. The cool man encourages the heated; the sober man urges on the intoxicated. O ye sons of wealth and profligacy, it is sad enough that you are often so tempted by the lusts that rise up in your own bosoms, but it is worse to be exposed to the friendship of wretches who never study your real good, but encourage you to indulge the vilest of your appetites, and smooth for you the way to hell!

The plan which Jonadab proposes for Amnon to obtain the object of his desire is founded on a stratagem which he is to practise on his father. He is to pretend sickness, and under this pretext to get matters arranged by his father as he would like. To practise deceit on a father was a thing not unknown even among the founders of the nation; Jacob and Jacob's sons had resorted to it alike. But it had been handed down with the mark of disgrace attached to it by God Himself. In spite of this it was counted both by Jonadab and Amnon a suitable weapon for their purpose. And so, as every one knows, it is counted not only a suitable, but a smart and laughable, device, in stage plays without number, and by the class of persons whose morality is reflected by the popular stage. Who so suitable a person to be made a fool of as "the governor"? Who so little to be pitied when he becomes the dupe of his children's cunning? "Honour thy father and thy mother," was once proclaimed in thunder from Sinai, and not only men's hearts trembled, but the very earth

shook at the voice. But these were old times and old-fashioned people. Treat your father and mother as useful and convenient tools, inasmuch as they have control of the purse, of which you are often in want. But as they are not likely to approve of the objects for which you would spend their money; as they are sure, on the other hand, to disapprove of them strongly, exercise your ingenuity in hoodwinking them as to your doings, and if your stratagem succeed, enjoy your chuckle at the blindness and simplicity of the poor old fools! If this be the course that commends itself to any son or daughter, it indicates a heart so perverted that it would be most difficult to bring it to any sense of sin. All we would say is, See what kind of comrades you have in this policy of deceiving parents. See this royal blackguard, Amnon, and his villainous adviser Jonadab, resorting to the very same method for hoodwinking King David; see them making use of this piece of machinery to compass an act of the grossest villainy that ever was heard of; and say whether you hold the device to be commended by their example, and whether you feel honoured in treading a course that has been marked before you by such footprints.

If anything more was needed to show the accomplished villainy of Amnon, it is his treatment of Tamar after he has violently compassed her ruin. It is the story so often repeated even at this day,—the ruined victim flung aside in dishonour, and left unpitied to her shame. There is no trace of any compunction on the part of Amnon at the moral murder he has committed, at the life he has ruined; no pity for the once blithe and happy maiden whom he has doomed to humiliation and woe. She has served his purpose, king's daughter though she is; let her crawl into the

earth like a poor worm to live or to die, in want or in misery; it is nothing to him. The only thing about her that he cares for is, that she may never again trouble him with her existence, or disturb the easy flow of his life. We think of those men of the olden time as utter barbarians who confined their foes in dismal dungeons, making their lives a continual torture, and denying them the slightest solace to the miseries of captivity. But what shall we say of those, high-born and wealthy men, it may be, who doom their cast-off victims to an existence of wretchedness and degradation which has no gleam of enjoyment, compared with which the silence and loneliness of a prison would be a luxury? Can the selfishness of sin exhibit itself anywhere or anyhow more terribly? What kind of heart can be left to the seducer, so hardened as to smother the faintest touch of pity for the woman he has made wretched for ever; so savage as to drive from him with the roughest execrations the poor confiding creature without whom he used to vow, in the days of her unsuspecting innocence, that he knew not how to live!

In a single word, our attention is now turned to the father of both Amnon and Tamar. "When King David heard of all these things, he was very wroth." Little wonder! But was this all? Was no punishment found for Amnon? Was he allowed to remain in the palace, the oldest son of the king, with nothing to mark his father's displeasure, nothing to neutralise his influence with the other royal children, nothing to prevent the repetition of his wickedness? Tamar, of course, was a woman. Was it for this reason that nothing was done to punish her destroyer? It does not appear that his position was in any way changed. We cannot but be indignant at the inactivity of David. Yet when

we think of the past, we need not be surprised. David was too much implicated in the same sins to be able to inflict suitable punishment for them. It is those whose hands are clean that can rebuke the offender. Let others try to administer reproof—their own hearts condemn them, and they shrink from the task. Even the king of Israel must wink at the offences of his son.

But if David winked, Absalom did nothing of the kind. Such treatment of his full sister, if the king chose to let it alone, could not be let alone by the proud, indignant brother. He nursed his wrath, and watched for his opportunity. Nothing short of the death of Amnon would suffice him. And that death must be compassed not in open fight but by assassination. At last, after two full years, his opportunity came. A sheepshearing at Baal-hazor gave occasion for a feast, to which the king and all his sons should be asked. His father excused himself on the ground of the expense. Absalom was most unwilling to receive the excuse, reckoning probably that the king's presence would more completely ward off any suspicion of his purpose, and utterly heedless of the anguish his father would have felt when he found that, while asked professedly to a feast, it was really to the murder of his eldest son. David, however, refuses firmly, but he gives Absalom his blessing. Whether this was meant in the sense in which Isaac blessed Jacob, or whether it was merely an ordinary occasion of commending Absalom to the grace of God, it was a touching act, and it might have arrested the arm that was preparing to deal such a fatal blow to Amnon. On the contrary, Absalom only availed himself of his father's expression of kindly feeling to beg that he would allow Amnon to be present. And he succeeded so well that

permission was given, not to Amnon only, but to all the king's sons. To Absalom's farm at Baal-hazor accordingly they went, and we may be sure that nothing would be spared to make the banquet worthy of a royal family. And now, while the wine is flowing freely, and the buzz of jovial talk fills the apartment, and all power of action on the part of Amnon is arrested by the stupefying influence of wine, the signal is given for his murder. See how closely Absalom treads in the footsteps of his father when he summons intoxicating drink to his aid, as David did to Uriah, when trying to make a screen of him for his own guilt. Yes, from the beginning, drink, or some other stupefying agent, has been the ready ally of the worst criminals, either preparing the victim for the slaughter or maddening the murderer for the deed. But wherever it has been present it has only made the tragedy more awful and the aspect of the crime more hideous. Give a wide berth, ye servants of God, to an agent with which the devil has ever placed himself in such close and deadly alliance!

It is not easy to paint the blackness of the crime of Absalom. We have nothing to say for Amnon, who seems to have been a man singularly vile; but there is something very appalling in his being murdered by the order of his brother, something very cold-blooded in Absalom's appeal to the assassins not to flinch from their task, something very revolting in the flagrant violation of the laws of hospitality, and something not less daring in the deed being done in the midst of the feast, and in the presence of the guests. When Shakespeare would paint the murder of a royal guest, the deed is done in the dead of night, with no living eye to witness it, with no living arm at hand capable

of arresting the murderous weapon. But here is a murderer of his guest who does not scruple to have the deed done in broad daylight in presence of all his guests, in presence of all the brothers of his victim, while the walls resound to the voice of mirth, and each face is radiant with festive excitement. Out from some place of concealment rush the assassins with their deadly weapons; next moment the life-blood of Amnon spurts on the table, and his lifeless body falls heavily to the ground. Before the excitement and horror of the assembled guests has subsided Absalom has made his escape, and before any step can be taken to pursue him he is beyond reach in Geshur in Syria.

Meanwhile an exaggerated report of the tragedy reaches King David's ears,—Absalom has slain all the king's sons, and there is not one of them left. Evil, at the bottom of his heart, must have been David's opinion of him when he believed the story, even in this exaggerated form. "The king arose and rent his clothes, and lay on the earth; and all his servants stood round with their clothes rent." Nor was it till Jonadab, his cousin, assured him that only Amnon could be dead, that the terrible impression of a wholesale massacre was removed from his mind. But who can fancy what the circumstances must have been, when it became a relief to David to know that Absalom had murdered but one of his brothers? Jonadab evidently thought that David did not need to be much surprised, inasmuch as this murder was a foregone conclusion with Absalom; it had been determined on ever since the day when Amnon forced Tamar. Here is a new light on the character of Jonadab. He knew that Absalom had determined that Amnon should die. It was no surprise to him

to hear that this purpose was carried out with effect. Why did he not warn Amnon? Could it be that he had been bribed over to the side of Absalom? He knew the real state of the case before the king's sons arrived. For when they did appear he appealed to David whether his statement, previously given, was not correct.

And now the first part of the retribution denounced by Nathan begins to be fulfilled, and fulfilled very fearfully,—"the sword shall never depart from thy house." Ancient history abounds in frightful stories, stories of murder, incest, and revenge, the materials, real or fabulous, from which were formed the tragedies of the great Greek dramatists. But nothing in their dramas is more tragic than the crime of Amnon, the incest of Tamar, and the revenge of Absalom. What David's feelings must have been we can hardly conceive. What must he have felt as he thought of the death of Amnon, slain by his brother's command, in his brother's house, at his brother's table, and hurried to God's judgment while his brain was reeling with intoxication! What a pang must have been shot by the recollection how David had once tried, for his own base ends, to intoxicate Uriah as Absalom had intoxicated Amnon! It does not appear that David's grief over Amnon was of the passionate kind that he showed afterwards when Absalom was slain; but, though quieter, it must have been very bitter. How could he but be filled with anguish when he thought of his son, hurried, while drunk, by his brother's act, into the presence of God, to answer for the worse than murder of his sister, and for all the crimes and sins of an ill-spent life! What hope could he entertain for the welfare of his soul? What balm could he find for such a wound?

And it was not Amnon only he had to think of. These three of his children, Amnon, Tamar, Absalom, in one sense or another, were now total wrecks. From these three branches of his family tree no fruit could ever come. Nor could the dead now bury its dead. Neither the remembrance nor the effect of the past could ever be wiped out. It baffles us to think how David was able to carry such grief. "David mourned for his son every day." It was only the lapse of time that could blunt the edge of his distress.

But surely there must have been terrible faults in David's upbringing of his family before such results as these could come. Undoubtedly there were. First of all, there was the number of his wives. This could not fail to be a source of much jealousy and discord among them and their children, especially when he himself was absent, as he must often have been, for long periods at a time. Then there was his own example, so unguarded, so unhallowed, at a point where the utmost care and vigilance had need to be shown. Thirdly, there seems to have been an excessive tenderness of feeling towards his children, and towards some of them in particular. He could not bear to disappoint; his feelings got the better of his judgment; when the child insisted the father weakly gave way. He wanted the firmness and the faithfulness of Abraham, of whom God had said, "I know him that he will *command* his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment." Perhaps, too, busy and often much pressed as he was with affairs of state, occupied with foreign wars, with internal improvements, and the daily administration of justice, he looked on his house as a place of simple relaxation and enjoyment, and forgot that there, too, he had a solemn

charge and most important duty. Thus it was that David failed in his domestic management. It is easy to spy out his defects, and easy to condemn him. But let each of you who have a family to bring up look to himself. You have not all David's difficulties, but you may have some of them. The precept and the promise is, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." It is not difficult to know the way he should go—the difficulty lies in the words, "Train up." To train up is not to force, nor is it merely to lay down the law, or to enforce the law. It is to get the whole nature of the child to move freely in the direction wished. To do this needs on the part of the parent a combination of firmness and love, of patience and decision, of consistent example and sympathetic encouragement. But it needs also, on the part of God, and therefore to be asked in earnest, believing prayer, that wondrous power which touches the springs of the heart, and draws it to Him and to His ways. Only by this combination of parental faithfulness and Divine grace can we look for the blessed result, "when he is old he will not depart from it."

CHAPTER XVIII.

ABSALOM BANISHED AND BROUGHT BACK

2 SAMUEL xiii. 38, 39; xiv.

GESHUR, to which Absalom fled after the murder of Amnon, accompanied in all likelihood by the men who had slain him, was a small kingdom in Syria, lying between Mount Hermon and Damascus. Maacah, Absalom's mother, was the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur, so that Absalom was there among his own relations. There is no reason to believe that Talmai and his people had renounced the idolatrous worship that prevailed in Syria. For David to ally himself in marriage with an idolatrous people was not in accordance with the law. In law, Absalom must have been a Hebrew, circumcised the eighth day; but in spirit he would probably have no little sympathy with his mother's religion. His utter alienation in heart from his father; the unconcern with which he sought to drive from the throne the man who had been so solemnly called to it by God; the vow which he pretended to have taken, when away in Syria, that if he were invited back to Jerusalem he would "serve the Lord," all point to a man infected in no small degree with the spirit, if not addicted to the practice, of idolatry. And the tenor of his life, so full of cold-blooded wickedness, exemplified well the influence of idolatry, which bred neither fear of God nor love of man.

We have seen that Amnon had not that profound hold on David's heart which Absalom had; and therefore it is little wonder that when time had subdued the keen sensation of horror, the king "was comforted concerning Amnon, seeing he was dead." There was no great blank left in his heart, no irrepressible craving of the soul for the return of the departed. But it was otherwise in the case of Absalom,—"the king's heart was towards him." David was in a painful dilemma, placed between two opposite impulses, the judicial and the paternal; the judicial calling for the punishment of Absalom, the paternal craving his restoration. Absalom in the most flagrant way had broken a law older even than the Sinai legislation, for it had been given to Noah after the flood—"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." But the deep affection of David for Absalom not only caused him to shrink from executing that law, but made him most desirous to have him near him again, pardoned, penitent as he no doubt hoped, and enjoying all the rights and privileges of the king's son. The first part of the chapter now before us records the manner in which David, in great weakness, sacrificed the judicial to the paternal, sacrificed his judgment to his feelings, and the welfare of the kingdom for the gratification of his affection. For it was too evident that Absalom was not a fit man to succeed David on the throne. If Saul was unfit to rule over God's people, and as God's vicegerent, much more was Absalom. Not only was he not the right kind of man, but, as his actions had showed, he was the very opposite. By his own wicked deed he was now an outlaw and an exile; he was out of sight and likely to pass out of mind; and it was most undesirable that any step should be taken to bring him back among the

people, and give him every chance of the succession. Yet in spite of all this the king in his secret heart desired to get Absalom back. And Joab, not studying the welfare of the kingdom, but having regard only to the strong wishes of the king and of the heir-apparent, devised a scheme for fulfilling their desire.

That collision of the paternal and the judicial, which David removed by sacrificing the judicial, brings to our mind a discord of the same kind on a much greater scale, which received a solution of a very different kind. The sin of man created the same difficulty in the government of God. The judicial spirit, demanding man's punishment, came into collision with the paternal, desiring his happiness. How were they to be reconciled? This is the great question on which the priests of the world, when unacquainted with Divine revelation, have perplexed themselves since the world began. When we study the world's religions, we see very clearly that it has never been held satisfactory to solve the problem as David solved his difficulty, by simply sacrificing the judicial. The human conscience refuses to accept of such a settlement. It demands that some satisfaction shall be made to that law of which the Divine Judge is the administrator. It cannot bear to see God abandoning His judgment-seat in order that He may show indiscriminate mercy. Fantastic and foolish in the last degree, grim and repulsive too, in many cases, have been the devices by which it has been sought to supply the necessary satisfaction. The awful sacrifices of Moloch, the mutilations of Juggernaut, the penances of popery, are most repulsive solutions, while they all testify to the intuitive conviction of mankind that something in the form of atonement is indispensable. But if these solu-

tions repel us, not less satisfactory is the opposite view, now so current, that nothing in the shape of sin-offering is necessary, that no consideration needs to be taken of the judicial, that the infinite clemency of God is adequate to deal with the case, and that a true belief in His most loving fatherhood is all that is required for the forgiveness and acceptance of His erring children. In reality this is no solution at all; it is just David's method of sacrificing the judicial; it satisfies no healthy conscience, it brings solid peace to no troubled soul. The true and only solution, by which due regard is shown both to the judicial and the paternal, is that which is so fully unfolded and enforced in the Epistles of St. Paul. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses.... For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

Returning to the narrative, we have next to examine the stratagem of Joab, designed to commit the king unwittingly to the recall of Absalom. The idea of the method may quite possibly have been derived from Nathan's parable of the ewe lamb. The design was to get the king to give judgment in an imaginary case, and thus commit him to a similar judgment in the case of Absalom. But there was a world-wide difference between the purpose of the parable of Nathan and that of the wise woman of Tekoah. Nathan's parable was designed to rouse the king's conscience as against his feelings; the woman of Tekoah's, as prompted by Joab, to rouse his feelings as against his conscience. Joab found a fitting tool for his purpose in a wise woman of Tekoah, a small town in the south of Judah. She was evidently an accommodating and unscrupulous person;

but there is no reason to compare her to the woman of Endor, whose services Saul had resorted to. She seems to have been a woman of dramatic faculty, clever at personating another, and at acting a part. Her skill in this way becoming known to Joab, he arranged with her to go to the king with a fictitious story, and induce him now to bring back Absalom. Her story bore that she was a widow who had been left with two sons, one of whom in a quarrel killed his brother in the field. All the family were risen against her to constrain her to give up the murderer to death, but if she did so her remaining coal would be quenched, and neither name nor remainder left to her husband on the face of the earth. On hearing the case, the king seems to have been impressed in the woman's favour, and promised to give an order accordingly. Further conversation obtained clearer assurances from him that he would protect her from the avenger of blood. Then, dropping so far her disguise, she ventured to remonstrate with the king, inasmuch as he had not dealt with his own son as he was prepared to deal with hers. "Wherefore then hast thou devised such a thing against the people of God? for in speaking this word, the king is as one that is guilty, in that the king doth not fetch home again his banished one. For we must needs die, and are as water spilt upon the ground which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God take away life, but deviseth means that he that is banished be not an outcast from Him." We cannot but be struck, though not favourably, with the pious tone which the woman here assumed to David. She represents that the continued banishment of Absalom is against the people of God,—it is not for the nation's interest that the heir-apparent should be for ever

banished. It is against the example of God, who, in administering His providence, does not launch His arrows at once against the destroyer of life, but rather shows him mercy, and allows him to return to his former condition. Clemency is a divine-like attribute. The king who can disentangle difficulties, and give such prominence to mercy, is like an angel of God. It is a divine-like work he undertakes when he recalls his banished. She can pray, when he is about to undertake such a business, "The Lord thy God be with thee" (R.V.). She knew that any difficulties the king might have in recalling his son would arise from his fears that he would be acting against God's will. The clever woman fills his eye with considerations on one side—the mercy and forbearance of God, the pathos of human life, the duty of not making things worse than they necessarily are. She knew he would be startled when she named Absalom. She knew that though he had given judgment on the general principle as involved in the imaginary case she had put before him, he might demur to the application of that principle to the case of Absalom. Her instructions from Joab were to get the king to sanction Absalom's return. The king has a surmise that the hand of Joab is in the whole transaction, and the woman acknowledges that it is so. After the interview with the woman, David sends for Joab, and gives him leave to fetch back Absalom. Joab goes to Geshur and brings Absalom to Jerusalem.

But David's treatment of Absalom when he returns does not bear out the character for unerring wisdom which the woman had given him. The king refuses to see his son, and for two years Absalom lives in his own house, without enjoying any of the privileges of

the king's son. By this means David took away all the grace of the transaction, and irritated Absalom. He was afraid to exercise his royal prerogative in pardoning him out-and-out. His conscience told him it ought not to be done. To restore at once one who had sinned so flagrantly to all his dignity and power was against the grain. Though therefore he had given his consent to Absalom returning to Jerusalem, for all practical purposes he might as well have been at Geshur. And Absalom was not the man to bear this quietly. How would his proud spirit like to hear of royal festivals at which all were present but he? How would he like to hear of distinguished visitors to the king from the surrounding countries, and he alone excluded from their society? His spirit would be chafed like that of a wild beast in its cage. Now it was, we cannot doubt, that he felt a new estrangement from his father, and conceived the project of seizing upon his throne. Now too it probably was that he began to gather around him the party that ultimately gave him his short-lived triumph. There would be sympathy for him in some quarters as an ill-used man; while there would rally to him all who were discontented with David's government, whether on personal or on public grounds. The enemies of his godliness, emboldened by his conduct towards Uriah, finding there what Daniel's enemies in a future age tried in vain to find in his conduct, would begin to think seriously of the possibility of a change. Probably Joab began to apprehend the coming danger when he refused once and again to speak to Absalom. It seemed to be the impression both of David and of Joab that there would be danger to the state in his complete restoration.

Two years of this state of things had passed, and the

patience of Absalom was exhausted. He sent for Joab to negotiate for a change of arrangements. But Joab would not see him. A second time he sent, and a second time Joab declined. Joab was really in a great difficulty. He seems to have seen that he had made a mistake in bringing Absalom to Jerusalem, but it was a mistake out of which he could not extricate himself. He was unwilling to go back, and he was afraid to go forward. He had not courage to undo the mistake he had made in inviting Absalom to return by banishing him again. If he should meet Absalom he knew he would be unable to meet the arguments by which he would press him to complete what he had begun when he invited him back. Therefore he studiously avoided him. But Absalom was not to be outdone in this way. He fell on a rude stratagem for bringing Joab to his presence. Their fields being adjacent to each other, Absalom sent his servants to set Joab's barley on fire. The irritation of such an unprovoked injury overcame Joab's unwillingness to meet Absalom; he went to him in a rage and demanded why this had been done. The matter of the barley would be easy to arrange; but now that he had met Joab he showed him that there were just two modes of treatment open to David,—either really to pardon, or really to punish him. This probably was just what Joab felt. There was no good, but much harm in the half-and-half policy which the king was pursuing. If Absalom was pardoned, let him be on friendly terms with the king. If he was not pardoned, let him be put to death for the crime he had committed.

Joab was unable to refute Absalom's reasoning. And when he went to the king he would press that view on him likewise. And now, after two years of a

half-and-half measure, the king sees no alternative but to yield. "When he had called for Absalom, he came to the king, and bowed himself to his face on the ground before the king ; and the king kissed Absalom." This was the token of reconciliation and friendship. But it would not be with a clear conscience or an easy mind that David saw the murderer of his brother in full possession of the honours of the king's son.

In all this conduct of King David we can trace only the infatuation of one left to the guidance of his own mind. It is blunder after blunder. Like many good but mistaken men, he erred both in inflicting punishments and in bestowing favours. Much that ought to be punished such persons pass over ; what they do select for punishment is probably something trivial ; and when they punish it is in a way so injudicious as to defeat its ends. And some, like David, keep oscillating between punishment and favour so as at once to destroy the effect of the one and the grace of the other. His example may well show all of you who have to do with such things the need of great carefulness in this important matter. Penalties, to be effectual, should be for marked offences, but when incurred should be firmly maintained. Only when the purpose of the punishment is attained ought reconciliation to take place, and when that comes it should be full-hearted and complete, restoring the offender tc the full benefit of his place and privilege, both in the home and in the hearts of his parents.

So David lets Absalom loose, as it were, on the people of Jerusalem. He is a young man of fine appearance and fascinating manners. "In all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty ; from the sole of the foot even to the crown of the head there was no blemish in him. And when he polled his

head (for it was at every year's end that he polled it; because his hair was heavy on him, therefore he polled it) the weight of the hair of his head was two hundred shekels after the king's weight." No doubt this had something to do with David's great liking for him. He could not but look on him with pride, and think with pleasure how much he was admired by others. The affection which owed so much to a cause of this sort was not likely to be of the highest or purest quality. What then are we to say of David's fondness for Absalom? Was it wrong for a father to be attached to his child? Was it wrong for him to love even a wicked child? No one can for a moment think so who remembers that "God *commended His love towards us*, in that *while we were yet sinners* Christ died for us." There is a sense in which loving emotions may warrantably be more powerfully excited in the breast of a godly parent toward an erring child than toward a wise and good one. The very thought that a child is in the thraldom of sin creates a feeling of almost infinite pathos with reference to his condition. The loving desire for his good and his happiness becomes more intense from the very sense of the disorder and misery in which he lies. The sheep that has strayed from the fold is the object of a more profound emotion than the ninety-and-nine that are safe within it. In this sense a parent cannot love his child, even his sinful and erring child, too well. The love that seeks another's highest good can never be too intense, for it is the very counterpart and image of God's love for sinful men.

But, as far as we can gather, David's love for Absalom was not exclusively of this kind. It was a fondness that led him to wink at his faults even when they became flagrant, and that desired to see him

occupying a place of honour and responsibility for which he certainly was far from qualified. This was more than the love of benevolence. The love of benevolence has, in the Christian bosom, an unlimited sphere. It may be given to the most unworthy. But the love of complacency, of delight in any one, of desire for his company, desire for close relations with him, confidence in him, as one to whom our own interests and the interests of others may be safely entrusted, is a quite different feeling. This kind of love must ever be regulated by the degree of true excellence, of genuine worth, possessed by the person loved. The fault in David's love to Absalom was not that he was too benevolent, not that he wished his son too well. It was that he had too much complacency or delight in him, delight resting on very superficial ground, and that he was too willing to have him entrusted with the most vital interests of the nation. This fondness for Absalom was a sort of infatuation, to which David never could have yielded if he had remembered the hundred and first Psalm, and if he had thought of the kind of men whom alone when he wrote that psalm he determined to promote to influence in the kingdom.

And on this we found a general lesson of no small importance. Young persons, let us say emphatically young women, and perhaps Christian young women, are apt to be captivated by superficial qualities, qualities like those of Absalom, and in some cases are not only ready but eager to marry those who possess them. In their blindness they are willing to commit not only their own interests but the interests of their children, if they should have any, to men who are not Christians, perhaps barely moral, and who are therefore not worthy of their trust. Here it is that affection should be

watched and restrained. Christians should never allow their affections to be engaged by any whom, on Christian grounds, they do not thoroughly esteem. All honour to those who, at great sacrifice, have honoured this rule! All honour to Christian parents who bring up their children to feel that, if they are Christians themselves, they can marry only in the Lord! Alas for those who deem accidental and superficial qualities sufficient grounds for a union which involves the deepest interests of souls for time and for eternity! In David's ill-founded complacency in Absalom, and the woeful disasters which flowed from it, let them see a beacon to warn them against any union which has not mutual esteem for its foundation, and does not recognise those higher interests in reference to which the memorable words were spoken by our Lord, "What is a man profited if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

CHAPTER XIX.

ABSALOM'S REVOLT.

2 SAMUEL XV. 1—12.

WHEN Absalom obtained from his father the position he had so eagerly desired at Jerusalem, he did not allow the grass to grow under his feet. The terms on which he was now with the king evidently gave him a command of money to a very ample degree. By this means he was able to set up an equipage such as had not previously been seen at Jerusalem. "He prepared him a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him." To multiply horses to himself was one of the things forbidden by the law of Moses to the king that should be chosen (Deut. xvii. 16), mainly, we suppose, because it was a prominent feature of the royal state of the kings of Egypt, and because it would have indicated a tendency to place the glory of the kingdom in magnificent surroundings rather than in the protection and blessing of the heavenly King. The style of David's living appears to have been quiet and unpretending, notwithstanding the vast treasures he had amassed; for the love of pomp or display was none of his failings. Anything in the shape of elaborate arrangement that he devised seems to have been in connection with the public service of God—for instance, his choir of singers and players (1 Chron. xxiii. 5); his

own personal tastes appear to have been simple and inexpensive. And this style undoubtedly befitted a royalty which rested on a basis so peculiar as that of the nation of Israel, when the king, though he used that title, was only the viceroy of the true King of the nation, and where it was the will of God that a different spirit should prevail from that prevalent among the surrounding nations. A modest establishment was evidently suited to one who recognised his true position as a subordinate lieutenant, not an absolute ruler.

But Absalom's tastes were widely different, and he was not the man to be restrained from gratifying them by any considerations of that sort. The moment he had the power, though he was not even king, he set up his imposing equipage, and became the observed of all observers in Jerusalem. And no doubt there were many of the people who sympathised with him, and regarded it as right and proper that, now that Israel was so renowned and prosperous a kingdom, its court should shine forth in corresponding splendour. The plain equipage of David would seem to them paltry and unimposing, in no way fitted to gratify the pride or elevate the dignity of the kingdom. Absalom's, on the other hand, would seem to supply all that David's wanted. The prancing steeds, with their gay caparisons, the troop of outrunners in glittering uniform, the handsome face and figure of the prince, would create a sensation wherever he went; There, men would say emphatically, is the proper state and bearing of a king; had we such a monarch as that, surrounding nations would everywhere acknowledge our superiority, and feel that we were entitled to the first place among the kingdoms of the East.

But Absalom was far too shrewd a man to base his

popularity merely on outward show. For the daring game which he was about to play it was necessary to have much firmer support than that. He understood the remarkable power of personal interest and sympathy in winning the hearts of men, and drawing them to one's side. He rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate, where in Eastern cities judgment was usually administered, but where, for some unknown reason, little seems to have been done by the king or the king's servants at that time. To all who came to the gate he addressed himself with winsome affability, and to those who had "a suit that should come to the king for judgment" (R.V.) he was especially encouraging. Well did he know that when a man has a lawsuit it usually engrosses his whole attention, and that he is very impatient of delays and hindrances in the way of his case. Very adroitly did he take advantage of this feeling,—sympathising with the litigant, agreeing with him of course that he had right on his side, but much concerned that there was no one appointed of the king to attend to his business, and devoutly and fervently wishing that he were made judge in the land, that every one that had any suit or cause might come to him, and he would do him justice. And with regard to others, when they came to do him homage he seemed unwilling to recognise this token of superiority, but, as if they were just brothers, he put forth his hand, took hold of them, and kissed them. If it were not for what we know now of the hollowness of it, this would be a pretty picture—an ear so ready to listen to the tale of wrong, a heart so full of sympathy, an active temperament that in the early hours of the morning sent him forth to meet the people and exchange kindly greetings with them; a form and

figure that graced the finest procession; a manner that could be alike dignified when dignity was becoming, and humility itself when it was right to be humble. But alas for the hollow-heartedness of the picture! It is like the fabled apples of Sodom, outside all fair and attractive, but dust within.

But hollow though it was, the policy succeeded—he became exceedingly popular; he secured the affections of the people. It is a remarkable expression that is used to denote this result—"He stole the hearts of the men of Israel." It was not an honest transaction. It was swindling in high life. He was appropriating valuable property on false pretences. To constitute a man a thief or a swindler it is not necessary that he forge a rich man's name, or that he put his hand into the pocket of his neighbour. To gain a heart by hypocritical means, to secure the confidence of another by lying promises, is equally low and wicked; nay, in God's sight is a greater crime. It may be that man's law has difficulty in reaching it, and in many cases cannot reach it at all. But it cannot be supposed that those who are guilty of it will in the end escape God's righteous judgment. And if the punishments of the future life are fitted to indicate the due character of the sins for which they are sent, we can think of nothing more appropriate than that those who have stolen hearts in this way, high in this world's rank though they have often been, should be made to rank with the thieves and thimbleriggers and other knaves who are the *habitués* of our prisons, and are scorned universally as the meanest of mankind. With all his fine face and figure and manner, his chariot and horses, his outrunners and other attendants, Absalom after all was but a black-hearted thief.

All this crooked and cunning policy of his Absalom carried on with unwearied vigour till his plot was ripe. There is reason to apprehend an error of some kind in the text when it is said (ver. 7) that it was "at the end of forty years" that Absalom struck the final blow. The reading of some manuscripts is more likely to be correct,—"at the end of four years," that is, four years after he was allowed to assume the position of prince. During that space of time much might be quietly done by one who had such an advantage of manner, and was so resolutely devoted to his work. For he seems to have laboured at his task without interruption all that time. The dissembling which he had to practise, to impress the people with the idea of his kindly interest in them, must have required a very considerable strain. But he was sustained in it by the belief that in the end he would succeed, and success was worth an infinity of labour. What a power of persistence is often shown by the children of this world, and how much wiser are they in their generation than the children of light as to the means that will achieve their ends! With what wonderful application and perseverance do many men labour to build up a business, to accumulate a fortune, to gain a distinction! I have heard of a young man who, being informed that an advertisement had appeared in a newspaper to the effect that if his family would apply to some one they would hear of something to their advantage, set himself to discover that advertisement, went over the advertisements for several years, column by column, first of one paper, then of another and another, till he became so absorbed in the task that he lost first his reason and then his life. Thank God, there are instances not a few of very noble application

and perseverance in the spiritual field; but is it not true that the mass even of good men are sadly remiss in the efforts they make for spiritual ends? Does not the energy of the racer who ran for the corruptible crown often put to shame the languor of those who seek for an incorruptible? And does not the manifold secular activity of which we see so much in the world around us sound a loud summons in the ears of all who are at ease in Zion—"Now it is high time to awake out of sleep"?

The copestone which Absalom put on his plot when all was ripe for execution was of a piece with the whole undertaking. It was an act of religious hypocrisy amounting to profanity. It shows how well he must have succeeded in deceiving his father when he could venture on such a finishing stroke. Hypocrite though he was himself, he well knew the depth and sincerity of his father's religion. He knew too that nothing could gratify him more than to find in his son the evidence of a similar state of heart. It is difficult to comprehend the villainy that could frame such a statement as this:—"I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the Lord, in Hebron. For thy servant vowed a vow, while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the Lord shall indeed bring me again to Jerusalem, then I will serve" (marg. R.V., worship) "the Lord." We have already remarked that it is not very clear from this whether up to this time Absalom had been a worshipper of the God of Israel. The purport of his pretended vow (that is, what he wished his father to believe) must have been either that, renouncing the idolatry of Geshur, he would now become a worshipper of Israel's God, or (what seems more likely) that in token of his purpose for the future

he would present a special offering to the God of Israel. This vow he now wished to redeem by making his offerings to the Lord, and for this purpose he desired to go to Hebron. But why go to Hebron? Might he not have redeemed it at Jerusalem? It was the custom, however, when a vow was taken, to specify the place where it was to be fulfilled, and in this instance Hebron was alleged to be the place. But what are we to think of the effrontery and wickedness of this pretence? To drag sacred things into a scheme of villainy, to pretend to have a desire to do honour to God simply for the purpose of carrying out deception and gaining a worldly end, is a frightful prostitution of all that ought to be held most sacred. It seems to indicate one who had no belief in God or in anything holy, to whom truth and falsehood, right and wrong, honour and shame, were all essentially alike, although, when it suited him, he might pretend to have a profound regard to the honour of God and a cordial purpose to render that honour. We are reminded of Charles II. taking the Covenant to please the Scots, and get their help towards obtaining the crown. But indeed the same great sin is involved in every act of religious hypocrisy, in every instance in which pretended reverence is paid to God in order to secure a selfish end.

The place was cunningly selected. It enjoyed a sanctity which had been gathering round it for centuries; whereas Jerusalem, as the capital of the nation, was but of yesterday. Hebron was the place where David himself had begun his reign, and while it was far enough from Jerusalem to allow Absalom to work unobserved by David, it was near enough to allow him to carry out the schemes which had been set on foot

there. So little suspicion had the old king of what was brewing that, when Absalom asked leave to go to Hebron, he dismissed him with a blessing—"Go in peace."

What Joab was thinking of all this we have no means of knowing. That a man who looked after his own interests so well as Joab did, should have stuck to David when his fortunes appeared to be desperate, is somewhat surprising. But the truth seems to be that Absalom never felt very cordial towards Joab after his refusal to meet him on his return from Geshur. It does not appear that Joab was much impressed by regard to God's will in the matter of the succession; his being engaged afterwards in the insurrection in favour of Adonijah when Solomon was divinely marked out for the succession shows that he was not. His adherence to David on this occasion was probably the result of necessity rather than choice. But what are we to say of his want of vigilance in allowing Absalom's conspiracy to advance as it did either without suspecting its existence, or at least without making provision for defending the king's cause? Either he was very blind or he was very careless. As for the king himself, we have seen what cause he had, after his great trespass, for courting solitude and avoiding contact with the people. That he should be ignorant of all that was going on need not surprise us. And moreover, from allusions in some of the Psalms (xxxviii., xxxix., xli.) to a loathsome and all but fatal illness of David's, and to treachery practised on him when ill, some have supposed that this was the time chosen by Absalom for consummating his plot. When Absalom said to the men applying for justice, whom he met at the gate of the city, "There

is no man deputed of the king to hear thee," his words implied that there was something hindering the king from being there in person, and for some reason he had not appointed a deputy. A protracted illness, unfitting David for his personal duties and for superintending the machinery of government, might have furnished Absalom with the pretext for his lamentation over this want. It gives us a harder impression of his villainy and hardness of heart if he chose a time when his father was enfeebled by disease to inflict a crushing blow on his government and a crowning humiliation on himself.

Three other steps were taken by Absalom before bringing the revolt to a crisis. First, he sent spies or secret emissaries to all the tribes, calling them, on hearing the sound of a trumpet, to acknowledge him as king at Hebron. Evidently he had all the talent for administration that was so conspicuous in his nation and in his house,—if only it had been put to a better use. Secondly, he took with him to Hebron a band of two hundred men, of whom it is said "they went in their simplicity, and they knew not anything' —so admirably was the secret kept. Thirdly, Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, having reason to believe that Ahithophel was on his side, and knowing that his counsel would be valuable to him in the present emergency. And every arrangement seemed to succeed admirably. The tide ran strongly in his favour—"the conspiracy was strong, for the people increased continually with Absalom." Everything seemed to fall out precisely as he wished; it looked as if the revolt would not only succeed, but that it would succeed without serious opposition. Absalom must have been full of expecta-

tion that in a few days or weeks he would be reigning unopposed at Jerusalem.

This extraordinary success is difficult to understand. For what could have made David so unpopular? In his earliest years he had been singularly popular; his victories brought him unbounded *éclat;* and when Ishbosheth died it was the remembrance of these early services that disposed the people to call him to the throne. Since that time he had increased his services in an eminent degree. He had freed his country from all the surrounding tribes that were constantly attacking it; he had conquered those distant but powerful enemies the Syrians; and he had brought to the country a great accumulation of wealth. Add to this that he was fond of music and a poet, and had written many of the very finest of their sacred songs. Why should not such a king be popular? The answer to this question will embrace a variety of reasons. In the first place, a generation was growing up who had not been alive at the time of his early services, and on whom therefore they would make a very slender impression. For service done to the public is very soon forgotten unless it be constantly repeated in other forms, unless, in fact, there be a perpetual round of it. So it is found by many a minister of the gospel. Though he may have built up his congregation from the very beginning, ministered among them with unceasing assiduity, and taken the lead in many important and permanent undertakings, yet in a few years after he goes away all is forgotten, and his very name comes to be unknown to many. In the second place, David was turning old, and old men are prone to adhere to their old ways; his government had become old-fashioned, and he showed no longer the life and vigour

of former days. A new, fresh, lively administration was eagerly desired by the younger spirits of the nation. Further, there can be no doubt that David's fervent piety was disliked by many, and his puritan methods of governing the kingdom. The spirit of the world is sure to be found in every community, and it is always offended by the government of holy men. Finally, his fall in the matter of Uriah had greatly impaired the respect and affection even of the better part of the community. If to all this there was added a period of feeble health, during which many departments of government were neglected, we shall have, beyond doubt, the principal grounds of the king's unpopularity. The ardent lovers of godliness were no doubt a minority, and thus even David, who had done so much for Israel, was ready to be sacrificed in the time of old age.

But had he not something better to fall back on? Was he not promised the protection and the aid of the Most High? Might he not cast himself on Him who had been his refuge and his strength in every time of need, and of whom he had sung so serenely that He is near to them that call on Him in sincerity and in truth? Undoubtedly he might, and undoubtedly he did. And the final result of Absalom's rebellion, the wonderful way in which its back was broken and David rescued and restored, showed that though cast down he was not forsaken. But now, we must remember, the second element of the chastisement of which Nathan testified, had come upon him. "Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house." That chastisement was now falling, and while it lasted the joy and comfort of God's gracious presence must have been interrupted. But all the same God was

still with him, even though He was carrying him through the valley of the shadow of death. Like the Apostle Peter, he was brought to the very verge of destruction; but at the critical moment an unseen hand was stretched out to save him, and in after-years he was able to sing, "He brought me up also out of a fearful pit, and out of the miry clay; and He set my feet upon a rock and established my goings; and He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God; many shall see it and shall fear, and shall trust in the Lord."

CHAPTER XX.

DAVID'S FLIGHT FROM JERUSALEM.

2 SAMUEL XV. 13.

THE trumpet which was to be the signal that Absalom reigned in Hebron had been sounded, the flow of people in response to it had begun, when "a messenger came to David saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom." The narrative is so concise that we can hardly tell whether or not this was the first announcement to David of the real intentions of Absalom. But it is very certain that the king was utterly unprepared to meet the sudden revolt. The first news of it all but overwhelmed him. And little wonder. There came on him three calamities in one. First, there was the calamity that the great bulk of the people had revolted against him, and were now hastening to drive him from the throne, and very probably to put him to death. Second, there was the appalling discovery of the villainy, hypocrisy, and heartless cruelty of his favourite and popular son,—the most crushing thing that can be thought of to a tender heart. And third, there was the discovery that the hearts of the people were with Absalom; David had lost what he most prized and desired to possess; the intense affection he had for his people now met with no response; their love and confidence were given

to a usurper. Fancy an old man, perhaps in infirm health, suddenly confronted with this threefold calamity; who can wonder for the time that he is paralysed, and bends before the storm?

Flight from Jerusalem seemed the only feasible course. Both policy and humanity seemed to dictate it. He considered himself unable to defend the city with any hope of success against an attack by such a force as Absalom could muster, and he was unwilling to expose the people to be smitten with the sword. Whether he was really as helpless as he thought we can hardly say. We should be disposed to think that his first duty was to stay where he was, and defend his capital. He was there as God's viceroy, and would not God be with him, defending the place where He had set His name, and the tabernacle in which He was pleased to dwell? It is not possible for us, ignorant as we are of the circumstances, to decide whether the flight from Jerusalem was the enlightened result of an overwhelming necessity, or the fruit of sudden panic, of a heart so paralysed that it could not gird itself for action. His servants had no other advice to offer. Any course that recommended itself to him they were ready to take. If this did not help to throw light on his difficulties, it must at least have soothed his heart. His friends were not all forsaking him. Amid the faithless a few were found faithful. Friends in such need were friends indeed. And the sight of their honest though perplexed countenances, and the sound of their friendly though trembling voices, would be most soothing to his feelings, and serve to rally the energy that had almost left him. When the world forsakes us, the few friends that remain are of priceless value.

On leaving Jerusalem David at once turned east-

ward, into the wilderness region between Jerusalem and Jericho, with the view, if possible, of crossing the Jordan, so as to have that river, with its deep valley, between him and the rebels. The first halt, or rather the rendezvous for his followers, though called in the A.V. "a place that was far off," is more suitably rendered in the R.V. Bethmerhak, and the margin "the far house." Probably it was the last house on this side the brook Kidron. Here, outside the walls of the city, some hasty arrangements were made before the flight was begun in earnest.

First, we read that he was accompanied by all his household, with the exception of ten concubines who were left to keep the house. Fain would we have avoided contact at such a moment with that feature of his house from which so much mischief had come; but to the end of the day David never deviated in that respect from the barbarous policy of all Eastern kings. The mention of his household shows how embarrassed he must have been with so many helpless appendages, and how slow his flight. And his household were not the only women and children of the company; the "little ones" of the Gittites are mentioned in ver. 22; we may conceive how the unconcealed terror and excitement of these helpless beings must have distressed him, as their feeble powers of walking must have held back the fighting part of his attendants. When one thinks of this, one sees more clearly the excellence of the advice afterwards given by Ahithophel to pursue him without loss of time with twelve thousand men, to destroy his person at once; in that case, Absalom must have overtaken him long before he reached the Jordan, and found him quite unable to withstand his ardent troops.

Next, we find mention of the forces that remained

faithful to the king in the crisis of his misfortunes. The Pelethites, the Cherethites, and the Gittites were the chief of these. The Pelethites and the Cherethites are supposed to have been the representatives of the band of followers that David commanded when hiding from Saul in the wilderness; the Gittites appear to have been a body of refugees from Gath, driven away by the tyranny of the Philistines, who had thrown themselves on the protection of David and had been well treated by him. The interview between David and Ittai was most creditable to the feelings of the fugitive king. Ittai was a stranger who had but lately come to Jerusalem, and as he was not attached to David personally, it would be safer for him to return to the city and offer to the reigning king the services which David could no longer reward. But the generous proposal of David was rejected with equal nobility on the part of Ittai. He had probably been received with kindness by David when he first came to Jerusalem, the king remembering well when he himself was in the like predicament, and thinking, like the African princess to Æneas, "*Haud ignara mali, miseris succurrere disco*"—"Having had experience of adversity myself, I know how to succour the miserable." Ittai's heart was won to David then; and he had made up his mind, like Ruth the Moabitess with reference to Naomi, that wherever David was, in life or in death, there also he should be. How affecting must it have been to David to receive such an assurance from a stranger! His own son, whom he had loaded with undeserved kindness, was conspiring against him, while this stranger, who owed him nothing in comparison, was risking everything in his cause. "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

Next in David's train presented themselves Zadok

and Abiathar, the priests, carrying the ark of God. The presence of this sacred symbol would have invested the cause of David with a manifestly sacred character in the eyes of all good men; its absence from Absalom would have equally suggested the absence of Israel's God. But David probably remembered how ill it had fared with Israel in the days of Eli and his sons, when the ark was carried into battle. Moreover, when the ark had been placed on Mount Zion, God had said, "This is My rest; here will I dwell;" and even in this extraordinary emergency, David would not disturb that arrangement. He said to Zadok, "Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, He shall bring me again, and show me both it and His habitation: but if He thus say, I have no delight in thee, behold, here am I; let Him do to me what seemeth good unto Him." These words show how much God was in David's mind in connection with the events of that humiliating day. They show, too, that he did not regard his case as desperate. But everything turned on the will of God. It might be that, in His great mercy, He would bring him back to Jerusalem. His former promises led him to think of this as a possible, perhaps probable, termination of the insurrection. But it might also be that the Lord had no more delight in him. The chastening with which He was now visiting him for his sin might involve the success of Absalom. In that case, all that David would say was that he was at God's disposal, and would offer no resistance to His holy will. If he was to be restored, he would be restored without the aid of the ark; if he was to be destroyed, the ark could not save him. Zadok and his Levites must carry it back into the city. The distance was a very short one, and they would be

able to have everything placed in order before Absalom could be there.

Another thought occurred to David, who was now evidently recovering his calmness and power of making arrangements. Zadok was a seer, and able to use that method of obtaining light from God which in great emergencies God was pleased to give when the ruler of the nation required it. But the marginal reading of the R.V., "Seest thou?" instead of "Thou art a seer," makes it doubtful whether David referred to this mystic privilege, which Zadok does not appear to have used; the meaning may be simply, that as he was an observant man, he could be of use to David in the city, by noticing how things were going and sending him word. In this way he could be of more use to him in Jerusalem than in the field. Considering how he was embarrassed with the women and children, it was better for David not to be encumbered with another defenceless body like the Levites. The sons of the priests, Ahimaaz and Jonathan, would be of great service in bringing him information. Even if he succeeded in reaching the plains (or fords, *marg.* R.V.) of the wilderness, they could easily overtake him, and tell him what plan of operations it would be wisest for him to follow.

These hasty arrangements being made, and the company placed in some sort of order, the march towards the wilderness now began. The first thing was to cross the brook Kidron. From its bed, the road led up the slope of Mount Olivet. To the spectators the sight was one of overwhelming sadness. "All the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over; the king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over toward the way of the

wilderness." After all, there was a large number who sympathised with the king, and to whom it was most affecting to see one who was now "old and grey-headed" driven from his throne and from his home by an unprincipled son, aided and abetted by a graceless generation who had no consideration for the countless benefits which David had conferred on the nation. It is when we find "all the country" expressing their sympathy that we cannot but doubt whether it was really necessary for David to fly. Perhaps "the country" here may be used in contrast to the city. Country people are less accessible to secret conspiracies, and besides are less disposed to change their allegiance. The event showed that in the more remote country districts David had still a numerous following. Time to gather these friends together was his great need. If he had been fallen on that night, weary and desolate and almost friendless, as was proposed by Ahithophel, there can be no rational doubt what the issue would have been.

And the king himself gave way to distress, like the people, though for different reasons. "David went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered; and he went barefoot; and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up." The covered head and bare feet were tokens of humiliation. They were a humble confession on the king's part that the affliction which had befallen him was well deserved by him. The whole attitude and bearing of David is that of one "stricken, smitten, and afflicted." Lofty looks and a proud bearing had never been among his weaknesses; but on this occasion, he is so meek and lowly that the poorest person in his

kingdom could not have assumed a more humble bearing. It is the feeling that had so wrung his heart in the fifty-first Psalm come back on him again. It is the feeling, Oh, what a sinner I have been! how forgetful of God I have often proved, and how unworthily I have acted toward man! No wonder that God rebukes me and visits me with these troubles! And not me only, but my people too. These are my children, for whom I should have provided a peaceful home, driven into the shelterless wilderness with me! These kind people who are compassionating me have been brought by me into this trouble, which peradventure will cost them their lives. "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness; according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions!"

It was at this time that some one brought word to David that Ahithophel the Gilonite was among the conspirators. He seems to have been greatly distressed at the news. For "the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had inquired of the oracle of God" (xvi. 23). An ingenious writer has found a reason for this step. By comparing 2 Sam. xi. 3 with 2 Sam. xxiii. 34, in the former of which Bathsheba is called the daughter of Eliam, and in the latter Eliam is called the son of Ahithophel, it would appear—if it be the same Eliam in both—that Ahithophel was the grandfather of Bathsheba. From this it has been inferred that his forsaking of David at this time was due to his displeasure at David's treatment of Bathsheba and Uriah. The idea is ingenious, but after all it is hardly trustworthy. For if Ahithophel was a man of such singular shrewdness, he would not be likely to let his personal feelings determine his public conduct. There

can be no reasonable doubt that, judging calmly from the kind of considerations by which a worldly mind like his would be influenced, he came to the deliberate conclusion that Absalom was going to win. And when David heard of his defection, it must have given him a double pang; first, because he would lose so valuable a counsellor, and Absalom would gain what he would lose; and second, because Ahithophel's choice showed the side that, to his shrewd judgment, was going to triumph. David could but fall back on that higher Counsellor on whose aid and countenance he was still able to rely, and offer a short but expressive prayer, "O Lord, I pray Thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness."

It was but a few minutes after this that another distinguished counsellor, Hushai the Archite, came to him, with his clothes rent and dust on his head, signifying his sense of the public calamity, and his adherence to David. Him too, as well as Ittai and the priests, David wished to send back. And the reason assigned showed that his mind was now calm and clear, and able to ponder the situation in all its bearings. Indeed, he concocts quite a little scheme with Hushai. First, he is to go to Absalom and pretend to be on his side. But his main business will be to oppose the counsel of Ahithophel, try to secure a little time to David, and thus give him a chance of escape. Moreover, he is to co-operate with the priests Zadok and Abiathar, and through their sons send word to David of everything he hears. Hushai obeys David, and as he returns to the city from the east, Absalom arrives from the south, before David is more than three or four miles away. But for the Mount of Olives intervening, Absalom might have seen the company that followed his father

creeping slowly along the wilderness, a company that could hardly be called an army, and that, humanly speaking, might have been scattered like a puff of smoke.

Thus Absalom gets possession of Jerusalem without a blow. He goes to his father's house, and takes possession of all that he finds there. He cannot but feel the joy of gratified ambition, the joy of the successful accomplishment of his elaborate and long-prosecuted scheme. Times are changed, he would naturally reflect, since I had to ask my father's leave for everything I did, since I could not even go to Hebron without begging him to allow me. Times are changed since I reared that monument in the vale for want of anything else to keep my name alive. Now that I am king, my name will live without a monument. The success of the revolution was so remarkable, that if Absalom had believed in God, he might have imagined, judging from the way in which everything had fallen out in his favour, that Providence was on his side. But, surely, there must have been a hard constraint and pressure upon his feelings somewhere. Conscience could not be utterly inactive. Fresh efforts to silence it must have been needed from time to time. Amid all the excitement of success, a vague horror must have stolen in on his soul. A vision of outraged justice would haunt him. He might scare away the hideous spectre for a time, but he could not lay it in the grave. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

But if Absalom might well be haunted by a spectre because he had driven his father from his house, and God's anointed from his throne, there was a still more fearful reckoning standing against him, in that he had enticed such multitudes from their allegiance, and

drawn them into the guilt of rebellion. There was not one of the many thousands that were now shouting "God save the king!" who had not been induced through him to do a great sin, and bring himself under the special displeasure of God. A rough nature like Absalom's would make light of this result of his movement, as rough natures have done since the world began. But a very different judgment was passed by the great Teacher on the effects of leading others into sin. "Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments and teach men so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of God." "Whoso shall cause one of these little ones which believe in Me to stumble, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were cast in the depth of the sea." Yet how common a thing this has been in all ages of the world, and how common it is still! To put pressure on others to do wrong; to urge them to trifle with their consciences, or knowingly to violate them; to press them to give a vote against their convictions;—all such methods of disturbing conscience and drawing men into crooked ways, what sin they involve! And when a man of great influence employs it with hundreds and thousands of people in such ways, twisting consciences, disturbing self-respect, bringing down Divine displeasure, how forcibly we are reminded of the proverb, "One sinner destroyeth much good"!

Most earnestly should every one who has influence over others dread being guilty of debauching conscience, and discouraging obedience to its call. On the other hand, how blessed is it to use one's influence in the opposite direction. Think of the blessedness of a life spent in enlightening others as to truth and duty, and encouraging loyalty to their high but often diffi-

cult claims. What a contrast to the other! What a noble aim to try to make men's eye single and their duty easy; to try to raise them above selfish and carnal motives, and inspire them with a sense of the nobility of walking uprightly, and working righteousness, and speaking the truth in their hearts! What a privilege to be able to induce our fellows to walk in some degree even as He walked "who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth;" and who, in ways so high above our ways, was ever influencing the children of men "to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God"!

CHAPTER XXI.

FROM JERUSALEM TO MAHANAIM.

2 SAMUEL xvi. 1—14; xvii. 15—22 and 24—26.

AS David proceeds on his painful journey, there flows from his heart a gentle current of humble contrite, gracious feeling. If recent events have thrown any doubt on the reality of his goodness, this fragrant narrative will restore the balance. Many a man would have been beside himself with rage at the treatment he had undergone. Many another man would have been restless with terror, looking behind him every other moment to see if the usurper's army was not hastening in pursuit of him. It is touching to see David, mild, self-possessed, thoroughly humble, and most considerate of others. Adversity is the element in which he shines; it is in prosperity he falls; in adversity he rises beautifully. After the humbling events in his life to which our attention has been lately called, it is a relief to witness the noble bearing of the venerable saint amid the pelting of this most pitiless storm.

It was when David was a little past the summit of Mount Olivet, and soon after he had sent back Hushai, that Ziba came after him,—that servant of Saul that had told him of Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, and whom he had appointed to take charge of the property

that had belonged to Saul, now made over to Mephibosheth. The young man himself was to be as one of the king's sons, and was to eat at the royal table. Ziba's account of him was, that when he heard of the insurrection he remained at Jerusalem, in the expectation that on that very day the kingdom of his father would be restored to him. It can hardly be imagined that Mephibosheth was so silly as to think or say anything of the kind. Either Ziba must have been slandering him now, or Mephibosheth must have slandered Ziba when David returned (see 2 Sam. xix. 24-30). With that remarkable impartiality which distinguishes the history, the facts and the statements of the parties are recorded as they occurred, but we are left to form our own judgment regarding them. All things considered, it is likely that Ziba was the slanderer and Mephibosheth the injured man. Mephibosheth was too feeble a man, both in mind and in body, to be forming bold schemes by which he might benefit from the insurrection. We prefer to believe that the son of Jonathan had so much of his father's nobility as to cling to David in the hour of his trial, and be desirous of throwing in his lot with him. If, however, Ziba was a slanderer and a liar, the strange thing about him is that he should have taken this opportunity to give effect to his villainy. It is strange that, with a soul full of treachery, he should have taken the trouble to come after David at all, and still more that he should have made a contribution to his scanty stores. We should have expected such a man to remain with Absalom, and look to him for the reward of unrighteousness. He brought with him for David's use a couple of asses saddled, and two hundred loaves of bread, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and an hundred of summer

fruits, and a bottle of wine. We get a vivid idea of the extreme haste with which David and his company must have left Jerusalem, and their destitution of the very necessaries of life as they fled, from this catalogue of Ziba's contributions. Not even were there beasts of burden "for the king's household"—even Bathsheba and Solomon may have been going on foot. David was evidently impressed by the gift, and his opinion of Mephibosheth was not so high as to prevent him from believing that he was capable of the course ascribed to him. Yet we cannot but think there was undue haste in his at once transferring to Ziba the whole of Mephibosheth's property. We can only say, in vnidication of David, that his confidence even in those who had been most indebted to him had received so rude a shock in the conduct of Absalom, that he was ready to say in his haste, "All men are liars;" he was ready to suspect every man of deserting him, except those that gave palpable evidence that they were on his side. In this number it seemed at the moment that Ziba was, while Mephibosheth was not; and trusting to his first impression, and acting with the promptitude necessary in war, he made the transfer. It is true that afterwards he discovered his mistake; and some may think that when he did he did not make a sufficient rectification. He directed Ziba and Mephibosheth to divide the property between them; but in explanation it has been suggested that this was equivalent to the old arrangement, by which Ziba was to cultivate the land, and Mephibosheth to receive the fruits; and if half the produce went to the proprietor, and the other half to the cultivator, the arrangement may have been a just and satisfactory one after all.

But if Ziba sinned in the way of smooth treachery,

Shimei, the next person with whom David came in contact, sinned not less in the opposite fashion, by his outrageous insolence and invective. It is said of this man that he was of the family of the house of Saul, and that fact goes far to account for his atrocious behaviour. We get a glimpse of that inveterate jealousy of David which during the long period of his reign slept in the bosom of the family of Saul, and which seemed now, like a volcano, to burst out all the more fiercely for its long suppression. When the throne passed from the family of Saul, Shimei would of course experience a great social fall. To be no longer connected with the royal family would be a great mortification to one who was vain of such distinctions. Outwardly, he was obliged to bear his fall with resignation, but inwardly the spirit of disappointment and jealousy raged in his breast. When the opportunity of revenge against David came, the rage and venom of his spirit poured out in a filthy torrent. There is no mistaking the mean nature of the man to take such an opportunity of venting his malignity on David. To trample on the fallen, to press a man when his back is at the wall, to pierce with fresh wounds the body of a stricken warrior, is the mean resource of ungenerous cowardice. But it is too much the way of the world. "If there be any quarrels, any exceptions," says Bishop Hall, "against a man, let him look to have them laid in his dish when he fares the hardest. This practice have wicked men learned of their master, to take the utmost advantage of their afflictions."

If Shimei had contented himself with denouncing the policy of David, the forbearance of his victim would not have been so remarkable. But Shimei was guilty of every form of offensive and provoking assault. He

threw stones, he called abusive names, he hurled wicked charges against David; he declared that God was fighting against him, and fighting justly against such a man of blood, such a man of Belial. And, as if this were not enough, he stung him in the most sensitive part of his nature, reproaching him with the fact that it was his son that now reigned instead of him, because the Lord had delivered the kingdom into his hand But even all this accumulation of coarse and shameful abuse failed to ruffle David's equanimity. Abishai, Joab's brother, was enraged at the presumption of a fellow who had no right to take such an attitude, and whose insolence deserved a prompt and sharp castigation. But David never thirsted for the blood of foes. Even while the rocks were echoing Shimei's charges, David gave very remarkable evidence of the spirit of a chastened child of God. He showed the same forbearance that he had shown twice on former occasions in sparing the life of Saul. "Why," asked Abishai, "should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go, I pray thee, and take off his head." "So let him curse," was David's answer, "because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David." It was but partially true that the Lord had told him to do so. The Lord had only permitted him to do it; He had only placed David in circumstances which allowed Shimei to pour out his insolence. This use of the expression, "The Lord hath said unto him," may be a useful guide to its true meaning in some passages of Scripture where it has seemed at first as if God gave very strange directions. The pretext that Providence had afforded to Shimei was this, "Behold, my son, which came out of my bowels, seeketh my life; how much more then may this Benjamite do it? Let him alone, and let him curse,

for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day." It is touching to remark how keenly David felt this dreadful trial as coming from his own son.

> "So the struck eagle stretched upon the plain,
> No more through rolling clouds to soar again,
> Viewed his own feather on the fatal dart
> That winged the shaft that quivered in his heart;
> Keen were his pangs, but keener far to feel
> He nursed the pinion which impelled the steel;
> While the same plumage that had warmed his nest
> Drank the last lifedrop of his bleeding breast."

But even the fact that it was his own son that was the author of all his present calamities would not have made David so meek under the outrage of Shimei if he had not felt that God was using such men as instruments to chastise him for his sins. For though God had never said to Shimei, "Curse David," He had let him become an instrument of chastisement and humiliation against him. It was the fact of his being such an instrument in God's hands that made the King so unwilling to interfere with him. David's reverence for God's appointment was like that which afterwards led our Lord to say, "The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink of it?" Unlike though David and Jesus were in the cause of their sufferings, yet there is a remarkable resemblance in their bearing under them. The meek resignation of David as he went out from the holy city had a strong resemblance to the meek resignation of Jesus as He was being led from the same city to Calvary. The gentle consideration of David for the welfare of his people as he toiled up Mount Olivet was parallel to the same feeling of Jesus expressed to the daughters of Jerusalem as He toiled up to Calvary. The forbearance of David to Shimei was like the spirit

of the prayer—"Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do." The overawing sense that God had ordained their sufferings was similar in both. David owed his sufferings solely to himself; Jesus owed His solely to the relation in which He had placed Himself to sinners as the Sin-bearer. It is beautiful to see David so meek and lowly under the sense of his sins—breathing the spirit of the prophet's words, "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved."

There was another thought in David's mind that helped him to bear his sufferings with meek submission. It is this that is expressed in the words, "It may be that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day." He felt that, as coming from the hand of God, all that he had suffered was just and righteous. He had done wickedly, and he deserved to be humbled and chastened by God, and by such instruments as God might appoint. But the particular words and acts of these instruments might be highly unjust to him: though Shimei was God's instrument for humiliating him, yet the curses of Shimei were alike unrighteous and outrageous; the charge that he had shed the blood of Saul's house, and seized Saul's kingdom by violence, was outrageously false; but it was better to bear the wrong, and leave the rectifying of it in God's hands; for God detests unfair dealing, and when His servants receive it He will look to it and redress it in His own time and way. And this is a very important and valuable consideration for those servants of God who are exposed to abusive language and treatment from scurrilous opponents, or, what is too common in our day, scurrilous newspapers. If injustice is done them,

let them, like David, trust to God to redress the wrong; God is a God of justice, and God will not see them treated unjustly. And hence that remarkable statement which forms a sort of appendix to the seven beatitudes —"Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and speak all manner of evil against you falsely for My name's sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you."

Ere we return to Jerusalem to witness the progress of events in Absalom's camp and cabinet, let us accompany David to his resting-place beyond the Jordan. Through the counsel of Hushai, afterwards to be considered, he had reached the plains of Jordan in safety; had accomplished the passage of the river, and traversed the path on the other side as far as Mahanaim, somewhere to the south of the Lake of Gennesareth, the place where Ishbosheth had held his court. It was a singular mercy that he was able to accomplish this journey, which in the condition of his followers must have occupied several days, without opposition in front or molestation in his rear. Tokens of the Lord's loving care were not wanting to encourage him on the way. It must have been a great relief to him to learn that Ahithophel's proposal of an immediate pursuit had been arrested through the counsel of Hushai. It was a further token for good, that the lives of the priests' sons, Jonathan and Ahimaaz, which had been endangered as they bore tidings for him, had been mercifully preserved. After learning the result of Hushai's counsel, they proceeded, incautiously perhaps, to reach David, and were observed and pursued. But a friendly woman concealed them in a well, as Rahab the harlot had hid the spies in the roof of her house; and though

they ran a great risk, they contrived to reach David's camp in peace.

And when David reached Mahanaim, where he halted to await the course of events, Shobi, the son of Nahash, king of Ammon, and Machir, the son of Ammiel of Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim, brought beds, and basons, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentiles, and parched pulse, and honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine, for David and for the people that were with him to eat; for they said, The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty in the wilderness." Some of those who thus befriended him were only requiting former favours. Shobi may be supposed to have been ashamed of his father's insulting conduct when David sent messengers to comfort him on his father's death. Machir, the son of Ammiel of Lo-debar, was the friend who had cared for Mephibosheth, and was doubtless thankful for David's generosity to him. Of Barzillai we know nothing more than is told us here. But David could not have reckoned on the friendship of these men, nor on its taking so useful and practical a turn. The Lord's hand was manifest in the turning of the hearts of these people to him. How hard bestead he and his followers were is but too apparent from the fact that these supplies were most welcome in their condition. And David must have derived no small measure of encouragement even from these trifling matters; they showed that God had not forgotten him, and they raised the expectation that further tokens of His love and care would not be withheld.

The district where David now was, "the other side of Jordan," lay far apart from Jerusalem and the more

frequented places in the country, and, in all probability, it was but little affected by the arts of Absalom. The inhabitants lay under strong obligations to David; in former times they had suffered most from their neighbours, Moab, Ammon, and especially Syria; and now they enjoyed a very different lot, owing to the fact that those powerful nations had been brought under David's rule. It was a fertile district, abounding in all kinds of farm and garden produce, and therefore well adapted to support an army that had no regular means of supply. The people of this district seem to have been friendly to David's cause. The little force that had followed him from Jerusalem would now be largely recruited; and, even to the outward sense, he would be in a far better condition to receive the assault of Absalom than on the day when he left the city.

The third Psalm, according to the superscription—and in this case there seems no cause to dispute it—was composed "when David fled from Absalom his son." It is a psalm of wonderful serenity and perfect trust. It begins with a touching reference to the multitude of the insurgents, and the rapidity with which they increased. Everything confirms the statement that "the conspiracy was strong, and that the people increased continually with Absalom." We seem to understand better why David fled from Jerusalem; even there the great bulk of the people were with the usurper. We see, too, how godless and unbelieving the conspirators were—"Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God." God was cast out of their reckoning as of no consideration in the case; it was all moonshine, his pretended trust in Him. Material forces were the only real power; the idea of God's favour was only cant, or at best but "a devout

imagination." But the foundation of his trust was too firm to be shaken either by the multitude of the insurgents or the bitterness of their sneers. "Thou, Lord, art a shield unto me"—ever protecting me, "my glory,"—ever honouring me, "and the lifter up of mine head,"—ever setting me on high because I have known Thy name. No doubt he had felt some tumult of soul when the insurrection began. But prayer brought him tranquillity. "I cried unto God with my voice, and He heard me out of His holy hill." How real the communion must have been that brought tranquillity to him amid such a sea of trouble! Even in the midst of his agitation he can lie down and sleep, and awake refreshed in mind and body. "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of the people that have set themselves against me round about." Faith already sees his enemies defeated and receiving the doom of ungodly men. "Arise, O Lord; save me, O my God; for Thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone; Thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly." And he closes as confidently and serenely as if victory had already come—"Salvation belongeth unto the Lord; Thy blessing is upon Thy people."

If, in this solemn crisis of his history, David is a pattern to us of meek submission, not less is he a pattern of perfect trust. He is strong in faith, giving glory to God, and feeling assured that what He has promised He is able also to perform. Deeply conscious of his own sin, he at the same time most cordially believes in the word and promise of God. He knows that, though chastened, he is not forsaken. He bows his head in meek acknowledgment of the righteousness of the chastisement; but he lays hold with unwavering trust on the mercy of God. This union of submission

and trust, is one of priceless value, and much to be sought by every good man. Under the deepest sense of sin and unworthiness, you may rejoice and you ought to rejoice, in the provision of grace. And while rejoicing most cordially in the provision of grace, you ought to be contrite and humble for your sin. You are grievously defective if you want either of these elements. If the sense of sin weighs on you with unbroken pressure, if it keeps you from believing in forgiving mercy, if it hinders you from looking to the cross, to Him who taketh away the sin of the world, there is a grievous defect. If your joy in forgiving mercy has no element of contrition, no chastened sense of unworthiness, there is no less grievous a defect in the opposite direction. Let us try at once to feel our unworthiness, and to rejoice in the mercy that freely pardons and accepts. Let us look to the rock whence we are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence we are digged; feeling that we are great sinners, but that the Lord Jesus Christ is a great Saviour; and finding our joy in that faithful saying, ever worthy of all acceptation, that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners," even the chief.

CHAPTER XXII.

ABSALOM IN COUNCIL.

2 Samuel xvi. 15—23; xvii. 1—14, and ver. 23.

WE must now return to Jerusalem, and trace the course of events there on that memorable day when David left it, to flee toward the wilderness, just a few hours before Absalom entered it from Hebron.

When Absalom came to the city, there was no trace of an enemy to oppose him. His supporters in Jerusalem would no doubt go out to meet him, and conduct him to the palace with great demonstrations of delight. Eastern nations are so easily roused to enthusiasm that we can easily believe that, even for Absalom, there would be an overpowering demonstration of loyalty. Once within the palace, he would receive the adherence and congratulations of his friends.

Among these, Hushai the Archite presents himself, having returned to Jerusalem at David's request, and it is to Hushai's honour that Absalom was surprised to see him. He knew him to be too good a man, too congenial with David "his friend," to be likely to follow such a standard as his. There is much to be read between the lines here. Hushai was not only a counsellor, but a friend, of David's. They were probably of kindred feeling in religious matters, earnest in serving God. A man of this sort did not seem to be in his own

place among the supporters of Absalom. It was a silent confession by Absalom that his supporters were a godless crew, among whom a man of godliness must be out of his element. The sight of Hushai impressed Absalom as the sight of an earnest Christian in a gambling saloon or on a racecourse would impress the greater part of worldly men. For even the world has a certain faith in godliness,—to this extent, at least, that it ought to be consistent. You may stretch a point here and there in order to gain favour with worldly men; you may accommodate yourselves to their ways, go to this and to that place of amusement, adopt their tone of conversation, join with them in ridiculing the excesses of this or that godly man or woman; but you are not to expect that by such approaches you will rise in their esteem. On the contrary, you may expect that in their secret hearts they will despise you. A man that acts according to his convictions and in the spirit of what he professes they may very cordially hate, but they are constrained to respect. A man that does violence to the spirit of his religion, in his desire to be on friendly terms with the world and further his interests, and that does many things to please them, they may not hate so strongly, but they will not respect. There is a fitness of things to which the world is sometimes more alive than Christians themselves. Jehoshaphat is not in his own place making a league with Ahab, and going up with him against Ramoth-gilead; he lays himself open to the rebuke of the seer—"Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord." There is no New Testament precept needing to be more pondered than this—"Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers; for what communion hath light with dark-

ness? or what fellowship hath Christ with Belial? or what communion hath he that believeth with an infidel?"

But Hushai was not content with putting in a silent appearance for Absalom. When his consistency is challenged, he must repudiate the idea that he has any preference for David; he is a loyal man in this sense, that he attaches himself to the reigning monarch, and as Absalom has received overwhelming tokens in his favour from every quarter, Hushai is resolved to stand by him. But can we justify these professions of Hushai? It is plain enough he went on the principle of fighting Absalom with his own weapons, of paying him with his own coin; Absalom had dissembled so profoundly, he had made treachery, so to speak, so much the current coin of the kingdom, that Hushai determined to use it for his own purposes. Yet, even in these circumstances, the deliberate dissembling of Hushai grates against every tender conscience, and more especially his introduction of the name of Jehovah —"Nay, but whom the Lord, and this people, and all the men of Israel choose, his will I be, and with him will I abide." Was not this taking the name of the Lord his God in vain? The stratagem had been suggested by David; it was not condemned by the voice of the age; and we are not prepared to say that stratagem is always to be condemned; but surely, in our time, the claims of truth and fair dealing would stamp it as a disreputable device, not sanctified by the end for which it was resorted to, and not worthy the followers of Him "who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth."

Having established himself in the confidence of Absalom, Hushai gained a right to be consulted in

the deliberations of the day. He enters the room where the new king's counsellors are met, but he finds it a godless assemblage. In planning the most awful wickedness, a cool deliberation prevails that shows how familiar the counsellors are with the ways of sin. "Give counsel among you," says the royal president, "what we shall do." How different from David's way of opening the business—"Bring hither the ephod, and enquire of the Lord." In Absalom's council help of that kind is neither asked nor desired.

The first to propose a course is Ahithophel, and there is something so revolting in the first scheme which he proposed that we wonder much that such a man should ever have been a counsellor of David. His first piece of advice, that Absalom should publicly take possession of his father's concubines, was designed to put an end to any wavering among the people; it was, according to Eastern ideas, the grossest insult that could be offered to a king, and that king a father, and it would prove that the breach between David and Absalom was irreparable, that it was vain to hope for any reconciliation. They must all make up their minds to take a side, and as Absalom's cause was so popular, it was far the most likely they would side with him. Without hesitation Absalom complied with the advice. It is a proof how hard his heart had become, that he did not hesitate to mock his father by an act which was as disgusting as it was insulting. And what a picture we get of the position of women even in the court of King David! They were slaves in the worst sense of the term, with no right even to guard their virtue, or to protect their persons from the very worst of men; for the custom of the country, when it gave him the throne, gave him likewise the bodies and

souls of the women of the harem to do with as he pleased!

The next piece of Ahithophel's counsel was a masterpiece alike of sagacity and of wickedness. He proposed to take a select body of twelve thousand out of the troops that had already flocked to Absalom's standard, and follow the fugitive king. That very night he would set out; and in a few hours they would overtake the king and his handful of defenders; they would destroy no life but the king's only; and thus, by an almost bloodless revolution, they would place Absalom peacefully on the throne. The advantages of the plan were obvious. It was prompt, it seemed certain of success, and it would avoid an unpopular slaughter. So strongly was Ahithophel impressed with the advantages that it seemed impossible that it could be opposed, far less rejected. One element only he left out of his reckoning—that "as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord God is round about His people from henceforth even for ever." He forgot how many methods of protecting David God had already employed. From the lion and the bear He had delivered him in his youth, by giving strength to his arm and courage to his heart; from the uncircumcised Philistine He had delivered him by guiding the stone projected from his sling to the forehead of the giant; from Saul, at one time through Michal letting him down from a window; at another, through Jonathan taking his side; at a third, by an invasion of the Philistines calling Saul away; and now He was preparing to deliver him from Absalom by a still different method: by causing the shallow proposal of Hushai to find more favour than the sagacious counsel of Ahithophel.

It must have been a moment of great anxiety to

Hushai when the man whose counsel was as the oracle of God sat down amid universal approval, after having propounded the very advice of which he was most afraid. But he shows great coolness and skill in recommending his own course, and in trying to make the worse appear the better reason. He opens with an implied compliment to Ahithophel—his counsel is not good *at this time.* It may have been excellent on all other occasions, but the present is an exception. Then he dwells on the warlike character of David and his men, and on the exasperated state of mind in which they might be supposed to be; probably they were at that moment in some cave, where no idea of their numbers could be got, and from which they might make a sudden sally on Absalom's troops; and if, on occasion of an encounter between the two armies, some of Absalom's were to fall, people would take it as a defeat; a panic might seize the army, and his followers might disperse as quickly as they had assembled.

But the concluding stroke was the masterpiece. He knew that vanity was Absalom's besetting sin. The young man that had prepared chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him, that had been accustomed to poll his head from year to year and weigh it with so much care, and whose praise was throughout all Israel for beauty, must be flattered by a picture of the whole host of Israel marshalled around him, and going forth in proud array, with him at its head. "Therefore I counsel that all Israel be generally gathered unto thee, from Dan even to Beersheba, as the sand that is by the sea for multitude, and that thou go to battle in thine own person. So shall we come upon him in some place where he may be found, and we will light upon him as the dew falleth on the ground; and of

him and of all the men that are with him there shall not be left so much as one. Moreover, if he be gotten into a city, then shall all Israel bring ropes to that city, and we will draw it into the river until there shall not be one small stone left there."

It is with counsel as with many other things: what pleases best is thought best; solid merit gives way to superficial plausibility. The counsel of Hushai pleased better than that of Ahithophel, and so it was preferred. Satan had outwitted himself. He had nursed in Absalom an overweening vanity, intending by its means to overturn the throne of David; and now that very vanity becomes the means of defeating the scheme, and laying the foundation of Absalom's ruin. The turning-point in Absalom's mind seems to have been the magnificent spectacle of the whole of Israel mustered for battle, and Absalom at their head. He was fascinated by the brilliant imagination. How easily may God, when He pleases, defeat the most able schemes of His enemies! He does not need to create weapons to oppose them; He has only to turn their own weapons against themselves. What an encouragement to faith even when the fortunes of the Church are at their lowest ebb! "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against His anointed, saying, Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall He speak to them in wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion."

The council is over; Hushai, unspeakably relieved, hastens to communicate with the priests, and through them send messengers to David; Absalom withdraws to

delight himself with the thought of the great military muster that is to flock to his standard; while Ahithophel, in high dudgeon, retires to his house. The character of Ahithophel was a singular combination. To deep natural sagacity he united great spiritual blindness and lack of true manliness. He saw at once the danger to the cause of Absalom in the plan that had been preferred to his own; but it was not that consideration, it was the gross affront to himself that preyed on him, and drove him to commit suicide. "When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass and arose and gat him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself and died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father." In his own way he was as much the victim of vanity as Absalom. The one was vain of his person, the other of his wisdom. In each case it was the man's vanity that was the cause of his death. What a contrast Ahithophel was to David in his power of bearing disgrace!—David, though with bowed head, bearing up so bravely, and even restraining his followers from chastising some of those who were so vehemently affronting him; Ahithophel unable to endure life because for once another man's counsel had been preferred to his. Men of the richest gifts have often shown themselves babes in self-control. Ahithophel is the Judas of the New Testament, lays plans for the destruction of his master, and, like Judas, falls almost immediately, by his own hand. "What a mixture," says Bishop Hall, "do we find here of wisdom and madness! Ahithophel will needs hang himself, *there* is madness; he will yet set his house in order, *there* is wisdom. And could it be possible that he that was so wise as to set his house

in order was so mad as to hang himself? that he should be so careful to order his house who had no care to order his unruly passions? that he should care for his house who cared not for his body or his soul? How vain is it for man to be wise if he is not wise in God. How preposterous are the cares of idle worldlings, that prefer all other things to themselves, and while they look at what they have in their coffers forget what they have in their breasts."

This council-chamber of Absalom is full of material for profitable reflection. The manner in which he was turned aside from the way of wisdom and safety is a remarkable illustration of our Lord's principle— "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." We are accustomed to view this principle chiefly in its relation to moral and spiritual life; but it is applicable likewise even to worldly affairs. Absalom's eye was not single. Success, no doubt, was the chief object at which he aimed, but another object was the gratification of his vanity. This inferior object was allowed to come in and disturb his judgment. If Absalom had had a single eye, even in a worldly sense, he would have felt profoundly that the one thing to be considered was, how to get rid of David and establish himself firmly on the throne. But instead of studying this one thing with firm and immovable purpose, he allowed the vision of a great muster of troops commanded by himself to come in, and so to distract his judgment that he gave his decision for the latter course. No doubt he thought that his position was so secure that he could afford the few days' delay which this scheme involved. All the same, it was this disturbing element of personal vanity that gave a twist to his vision, and led him to the conclusion which lost him everything.

For even in worldly things, singleness of eye is a great help towards a sound conclusion. "To the upright there ariseth light in the darkness." And if this rule hold true in the worldly sphere, much more in the moral and spiritual. It is when you have the profoundest desire to do what is right that you are in the best way to know what is wise. In the service of God you are grievously liable to be distracted by private feelings and interests of your own. It is when these private interests assert themselves that you are most liable to lose the clear line of duty and of wisdom. You wish to do God's will, but at the same time you are very unwilling to sacrifice this interest, or expose yourself to that trouble. Thus your own feeling becomes a screen that dims your vision, and prevents you from seeing the path of duty and wisdom alike. You have not a clear sight of the right path. You live in an atmosphere of perplexity; whereas men of more single purpose, and more regardless of their own interests, see clearly and act wisely. Was there anything more remarkable in the Apostle Paul than the clearness of his vision, the decisive yet admirable way in which he solved perplexing questions, and the high practical wisdom that guided him throughout? And is not this to be connected with his singleness of eye, his utter disregard of personal interests in his public life—his entire devotion to the will and to the service of his Master? From that memorable hour on the way to Damascus, when he put the question, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" onward to the day when he laid his head on the block in imperial Rome, the one interest of his heart, the one thought of his mind, was to do the will of Christ. Never was an eye more single, and never was a body more full of light.

But again, from that council-chamber of Absalom and its results we learn how all projects founded on godlessness and selfishness carry in their bosom the elements of dissolution. They have no true principle of coherence, no firm, binding element, to secure them against disturbing influences arising from further manifestations of selfishness on the part of those engaged in them. Men may be united by selfish interest in some undertaking up to a certain point, but, like a rocket in the air, selfishness is liable to burst up in a thousand different directions, and then the bond of union is destroyed. The only bond of union that can resist distracting tendencies is an immovable regard to the will of God, and, in subordination thereto, to the welfare of men. In our fallen world it is seldom—rather, it is never—that any great enterprise is undertaken and carried forward on grounds where selfishness has no place whatever. But we may say this very confidently, that the more an undertaking is based on regard to God's will and the good of men, the more stability and true prosperity will it enjoy; whereas every element of selfishness or self-seeking that may be introduced into it is an element of weakness, and tends to its dissolution. The remark is true of Churches and religious societies, of religious movements and political movements too.

Men that are not overawed, as it were, by a supreme regard to the will of God; men to whom the consideration of that will is not strong enough at once to smite down every selfish feeling that may arise in their minds, will always be liable to desire some object of their own rather than the good of the whole. They will begin to complain if they are not sufficiently considered and honoured. They will allow jealousies and suspicions towards those who have most influence to

arise in their hearts. They will get into caves to air their discontent with those like-minded. All this tends to weakness and dissolution. Selfishness is the serpent that comes crawling into many a hopeful garden, and brings with it division and desolation. In private life, it should be watched and thwarted as the grievous foe of all that is good and right. The same course should be taken with regard to it in all the associations of Christians. And it is Christian men only that are capable of uniting on grounds so high and pure as to give some hope that this evil spirit will not succeed in disuniting them—that is to say, men who feel and act on the obligations under which the Lord Jesus Christ has placed them; men that feel that their own redemption, and every blessing they have or hope to have, come through the wonderful self-denial of the Son of God, and that if they have the faintest right to His holy name they must not shrink from the like self-denial. It is a happy thing to be able to adopt as our rule—"None of us liveth to himself; for whether we live, we live unto the Lord, or whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's." The more this rule prevails in Churches and Christian societies, the more will there be of union and stability too; but with its neglect, all kinds of evil and trouble will come in, and very probably, disruption and dissolution in the end.

CHAPTER XXIII.

2 Samuel xviii. 1—18.

ABSALOM'S DEFEAT AND DEATH.

WHATEVER fears of defeat and destruction might occasionally flit across David's soul between his flight from Jerusalem and the battle in the wood of Ephraim, it is plain both from his actions and from his songs that his habitual frame was one of serenity and trust. The number of psalms ascribed to this period of his life may be in excess of the truth; but that his heart was in near communion with God all the time we cannot doubt. Situated as his present refuge was not far from Peniel, where Jacob had wrestled with the angel, we may believe that there were wrestlings again in the neighbourhood not unworthy to be classed with that from which Peniel derived its memorable name.

In the present emergency the answer to prayer consisted, first, in the breathing-time secured by the success of Hushai's counsel; second, in the countenance and support of the friends raised up to David near Mahanaim; and last, not least, in the spirit of wisdom and harmony with which all the arrangements were made for the inevitable encounter. Every step was taken with prudence, while every movement of his opponents seems to have been a blunder. It was wise in David, as we have already seen, to cross the Jordan

and retire into Gilead; it was wise in him to make Mahanaim his headquarters; it was wise to divide his army into three parts, for a reason that will presently be seen; and it was wise to have a wood in the neighbourhood of the battlefield, though it could not have been foreseen how this was to bear on the individual on whose behalf the insurrection had taken place.

By this time the followers of David had grown to the dimensions of an army. We are furnished with no means of knowing its actual number. Josephus puts it at four thousand, but, judging from some casual expressions ("David set captains of hundreds and *captains of thousands* over them," ver. 1; "Now thou art worth *ten thousand* of us," ver. 3; "The people came by thousands," ver. 4), we should infer that David's force amounted to a good many thousands. The division of the army into three parts, however, reminding us, as it does, of Gideon's division of his little force into three, would seem to imply that David's force was far inferior in number to Absalom's. The insurrectionary army must have been very large, and stretching over a great breadth of country, would have presented far too wide a line to be effectually dealt with by a single body of troops, comparatively small. Gideon had divided his handful into three that he might make a simultaneous impression on three different parts of the Midianite host, and thus contribute the better to the defeat of the whole. So David divided his army into three, that, meeting Absalom's at three different points, he might prevent a concentration of the enemy that would have swallowed up his whole force. David had the advantage of choosing his ground, and his military instinct and long experience would doubtless enable him to do this with great effect. His three generals were able

and valuable leaders. The aged king was prepared to take part in the battle, believing that his presence would be helpful to his men; but the people would not allow him to run the risk. Aged and somewhat infirm as he seems to have been, wearied with his flight, and weakened with the anxieties of so distressing an occasion, the excitement of the battle might have proved too much for him, even if he had escaped the enemy's sword. Besides, everything depended on him; if his place were discovered by the enemy, their hottest assault would be directed to it; and if he should fall, there would be left no cause to fight for. "It is better," they said to him, "that thou succour us out of the city." What kind of succour could he render there? Only the succour that Moses and his two attendants rendered to Israel in the fight with Amalek in the wilderness, when Moses held up his hands, and Aaron and Hur propped them up. He might pray for them; he could do no more.

By this time Absalom had probably obtained the great object of his ambition; he had mustered Israel from Dan to Beersheba, and found himself at the head of an array very magnificent in appearance, but, like most Oriental gatherings of the kind, somewhat unwieldy and unworkable. This great conglomeration was now in the immediate neighbourhood of Mahanaim, and must have seemed as if by sheer weight of material it would crush any force that could be brought against it. We read that the battle took place "in the wood of Ephraim." This could not be a wood in the tribe of Ephraim, for that was on the other side of Jordan, but a wood in Gilead, that for some reason unknown to us had been called by that name. The whole region is still richly wooded, and among its prominent trees is one

called the prickly oak. A *dense* wood would obviously be unsuitable for battle, but a wooded district, with clumps here and there, especially on the hill-sides, and occasional trees and brushwood scattered over the plains, would present many advantages to a smaller force opposing the onset of a larger. In the American war of 1755 some of the best troops of England were nearly annihilated in a wood near Pittsburg in Pennsylvania, the Indians levelling their rifles unseen from behind the trees, and discharging them with yells that were even more terrible than their weapons. We may fancy the three battalions of David making a vigorous onslaught on Absalom's troops as they advanced into the wooded country, and when they began to retreat through the woods, and got entangled in brushwood, or jammed together by thickset trees, discharging arrows at them, or falling on them with the sword, with most disastrous effect. "There was a great slaughter that day of twenty thousand men. For the battle there was scattered over the face of all the country, and the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured." Many of David's men were probably natives of the country, and in their many encounters with the neighbouring nations had become familiar with the warfare of "the bush." Here was one benefit of the choice of Mahanaim by David as his rallying-ground. The people that joined him from that quarter knew the ground, and knew how to adapt it to fighting purposes; the most of Absalom's forces had been accustomed to the bare wadies and limestone rocks of Western Palestine, and, when caught in the thickets, could neither use their weapons nor save themselves by flight.

Very touching, if not very business-like, had been

David's instructions to his generals about Absalom: "The king commanded Joab and Abishai and Ittai saying, Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom. And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains charge concerning Absalom." It is interesting to observe that David fully expects to win. There is no hint of any alternative, as if Absalom would not fall into their hands. David knows that he is going to conquer, as well as he knew it when he went against the giant. The confidence which is breathed in the third Psalm is apparent here. Faith saw his enemies already defeated. "Thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheekbone; Thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly. Salvation belongeth unto the Lord; Thy blessing is upon Thy people." In a pitched battle, God could not give success to a godless crew, whose whole enterprise was undertaken to drive God's anointed one from his throne. Temporary and partial successes they might have, but final success it was morally impossible for God to accord. It was not the spirit of his own troops, nor the undisciplined condition of the opposing host, that inspired this confidence, but the knowledge that there was a God in Israel, who would not suffer His anointed to perish, nor the impious usurper to triumph over him.

We cannot tell whether Absalom was visited with any misgivings as to the result before the battle began. Very probably he was not. Having no faith in God, he would make no account whatever of what David regarded as the Divine palladium of his cause. But if he entered on the battle confident of success, his anguish is not to be conceived when he saw his troops yield to panic, and, in wild disorder, try to dash through

the wood. Dreadful miseries must have overwhelmed him. He does not appear to have made any attempt to rally his troops. Riding on a mule, in his haste to escape, he probably plunged into some thick part of the wood, where his head came in contact with a mass of prickly oak; struggling to make a way through it, he only entangled his hair more hopelessly in the thicket; then, raising himself in the saddle to attack it with his hands, his mule went from under him, and left him hanging between heaven and earth, maddened by pain, enraged at the absurdity of his plight, and storming against his attendants, none of whom was near him in his time of need. Nor was this the worst of it. Absalom was probably among the foremost of the fugitives, and we can hardly suppose but that many of his own people fled that way after him. Could it be that all of them were so eager to escape that not one of them would stop to help their king? What a contrast the condition of Absalom when fortune turned against him to that of his father! Dark though David's trials had been, and seemingly desperate his position, he had not been left alone in its sudden horrors; the devotion of strangers, as well as the fidelity of a few attached friends, had cheered him, and had the worst disaster befallen him, had his troops been routed and his cause ruined, there were warm and bold hearts that would not have deserted him in his extremity, that would have formed a wall around him, and with their lives defended his grey hairs. But when the hour of calamity came to Absalom it found him alone. Even Saul had his armour-bearer at his side when he fled over Gilboa; but neither armour-bearer nor friend attended Absalom as he fled from the battle of the wood of Ephraim. It would have

been well for him if he had really gained a few of the many hearts he stole. Much though moralists tell us of the heartlessness of the world in the hour of adversity, we should not have expected to light on so extreme a case of it. We can hardly withhold a tear at the sight of the unhappy youth, an hour ago with thousands eager to obey him, and a throne before him, apparently secure from danger; now hanging helpless between earth and heaven, with no companion but an evil conscience, and no prospect but the judgment of an offended God.

A recent writer, in his "History of the English People" (Green), when narrating the fall of Cardinal Wolsey, powerfully describes the way of Providence in suffering a career of unexampled wickedness and ambition to go on from one degree of prosperity to another, till the moment of doom arrives, when all is shattered by a single blow. There was long delay, but "the hour of reckoning at length arrived. Slowly the hand had crawled along the dial-plate, slowly as if the event would never come; and wrong was heaped on wrong, and oppression cried, and it seemed as if no ear had heard its voice, till the measure of the wickedness was at length fulfilled. The finger touched the hour; and as the strokes of the great hammer rang out above the nation, in an instant the whole fabric of iniquity was shivered to ruins."

This hour had now come to Absalom. He had often been reproved, but had hardened his heart, and was now to be destroyed, and that without remedy. In the person of Joab, God found a fitting instrument for carrying His purpose into effect. The character of Joab is something of a riddle. We cannot say that he was altogether a bad man, or altogether without the

fear of God. Though David bitterly complained of him in some things, he must have valued him on the whole, for during the whole of his reign Joab had been his principal general. That he wanted all tenderness of heart seems very plain. That he was subject to vehement and uncontrollable impulses, in the heat of which fearful deeds of blood were done by him, but done in what seemed to him the interest of the public, is also clear. There is no evidence that he was habitually savage or grossly selfish. When David charged him and the other generals to deal tenderly with the young man Absalom, it is quite possible that he was minded to do so. But in the excitement of the battle, that uncontrollable impulse seized him which urged him to the slaughter of Amasa and Abner. The chance of executing judgment on the arch-rebel who had caused all this misery, and been guilty of crimes never before heard of in Israel, and thus ending for ever an insurrection that might have dragged its slow length along for harassing years to come, was too much for him. "How could you see Absalom hanging in an oak and not put an end to his mischievous life?" he asks the man that tells him he had seen him in that plight. And he has no patience with the man's elaborate apology. Seizing three darts, he rushes to the place, and thrusts them through Absalom's heart. And his ten armour-bearers finish the business with their swords. We need not suppose that he was altogether indifferent to the feelings of David; but he may have been seized by an overwhelming conviction that Absalom's death was the only effectual way of ending this most guilty and pernicious insurrection, and so preserving the country from ruin. Absalom living, whether banished or imprisoned, would be a constant and fearful danger. Absalom dead,

great though the king's distress for the time might be, would be the very salvation of the country. Under the influence of this conviction he thrust the three darts through his heart, and he allowed his attendants to hew that comely body to pieces, till the fair form that all had admired so much became a mere mass of hacked and bleeding flesh. But whatever may have been the process by which Joab found himself constrained to disregard the king's order respecting Absalom, it is plain that to his dying day David never forgave him.

The mode of Absalom's death, and also the mode of his burial, were very significant. It had probably never happened to any warrior, or to any prince, to die from a similar cause. And but for the vanity that made him think so much of his bodily appearance, and especially of his hair, death would never have come to him in such a form. Vanity of one's personal appearance is indeed a weakness rather than a crime. It would be somewhat hard to punish it directly, but it is just the right way of treating it, to make it punish itself. And so it was in the case of Absalom. His bitterest enemy could have desired nothing more ludicrously tragical than to see those beautiful locks fastening him as with a chain of gold to the arm of the scaffold, and leaving him dangling there like the most abject malefactor. And what of the beautiful face and handsome figure that often, doubtless, led his admirers to pronounce him every inch a king? So slashed and mutilated under the swords of Joab's ten men, that no one could have told that it was Absalom that lay there. This was God's judgment on the young man's vanity.

The mode of his burial is particularly specified. "They took Absalom and cast him into a great pit in

the wood, and laid a very great heap of stones upon him; and all Israel fled every one to his tent." The purpose of this seems to have been to show that Absalom was deemed worthy of the punishment of the rebellious son, as appointed by Moses; and a more significant expression of opinion could not have been given. The punishment for the son who remained incorrigibly rebellious was to be taken beyond the walls of the city, and stoned to death. It is said by Jewish writers that this punishment was never actually inflicted, but the mode of Absalom's burial was fitted to show that he at least was counted as deserving of it. The ignominious treatment of that graceful body, which he adorned and set off with such care, did not cease even after it was gashed by the weapons of the young men; no place was found for it in the venerable cave of Machpelah; it was not even laid in the family sepulchre at Jerusalem, but cast ignominiously into a pit in the wood; it was bruised and pounded by stones, and left to rot there, like the memory of its possessor, and entail eternal infamy on the place. What a lesson to all who disown the authority of parents! What a warning to all who cast away the cords of self-restraint! It is said by Jewish writers that every by-passer was accustomed to throw a stone on the heap that covered the remains of Absalom, and as he threw it to say, "Cursed be the memory of rebellious Absalom; and cursed for ever be all wicked children that rise up in rebellion against their parents!"

And here it may be well to say a word to children. You all see the lesson that is taught by the doom of Absalom, and you all feel that in that doom, terrible though it was, he just reaped what he had sowed. You see the seed of his offence, disobedience to parents,

bringing forth the most hideous fruit, and receiving in God's providence a most frightful punishment. You see it without excuse and without palliation ; for David had been a kind father, and had treated Absalom better than he deserved. Mark, then, that this is the final fruit of that spirit of disobedience to parents which often begins with very little offences. These little offences are big enough to show that you prefer your own will to the will of your parents. If you had a just and true respect for their authority, you would guard against little transgressions—you would make conscience of obeying in all things great and small. Then remember that every evil habit must have a beginning, and very often it is a small beginning. By imperceptible stages it may grow and grow, till it becomes a hideous vice, like this rebellion of Absalom. Nip it in the bud; if you don't, who can tell whether it may not grow to something terrible, and at last brand you with the brand of Absalom ?

If this be the lesson to children from the doom of Absalom, the lesson to parents is not less manifest from the case of David. The early battle between the child's will and the parent's is often very difficult and trying ; but God is on the parent's side, and will give him the victory if he seeks it aright. It certainly needs great vigilance, wisdom, patience, firmness, and affection. If you are careless and unwatchful, the child's will will speedily assert itself. If you are foolish, and carry discipline too far, if you thwart the child at every point, instead of insisting on one thing, or perhaps a few things, at a time, you will weary him and weary yourself without success. If you are fitful, insisting at one time and taking no heed at another, you will convey the impression of a very elastic law,

not entitled to much respect. If you lose your temper, and speak unadvisedly, instead of mildly and lovingly, you will most effectually set the child's temper up against the very thing you wish him to do. If you forget that you are not independent agents, but have got the care of your beloved child from God, and ought to bring him up as in God's stead, and in the most humble and careful dependence on God's grace, you may look for blunder upon blunder in sad succession, with results in the end that will greatly disappoint you. How close every Christian needs to lie to God in the exercise of this sacred trust! And how much, when conscious of weakness and fearing the consequences, ought he to prize the promise—"My grace is sufficient for thee!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

DAVID'S GRIEF FOR ABSALOM.

2 Samuel xviii. 19-33; xix. 1-4.

"NEXT to the calamity of losing a battle," a great general used to say, "is that of gaining a victory." The battle in the wood of Ephraim left twenty thousand of King David's subjects dead or dying on the field. It is remarkable how little is made of this dismal fact. Men's lives count for little in time of war, and death, even with its worst horrors, is just the common fate of warriors. Yet surely David and his friends could not think lightly of a calamity that cut down more of the sons of Israel than any battle since the fatal day of Mount Gilboa. Nor could they form a light estimate of the guilt of the man whose inordinate vanity and ambition had cost the nation such a fearful loss.

But all thoughts of this kind were for the moment brushed aside by the crowning fact that Absalom himself was dead. And this fact, as well as the tidings of the victory, must at once be carried to David. Mahanaim, where David was, was probably but a little distance from the field of battle. A friend offered to Joab to carry the news—Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok the priest. He had formerly been engaged in the same way, for he was one of those that had brought word to David of the

result of Absalom's council, and of other things that were going on in Jerusalem. But Joab did not wish that Ahimaaz should be the bearer of the news. He would not deprive him of the character of king's messenger, but he would employ him as such another time. Meanwhile the matter was entrusted to another man, called in the Authorized Version Cushi, but in the Revised Version the Cushite. Whoever this may have been, he was a simple official, not like Ahimaaz, a personal friend of David. And this seems to have been Joab's reason for employing him. It is evident that physically he was not better adapted to the task than Ahimaaz, for when the latter at last got leave to go he overran the Cushite. But Joab appears to have felt that it would be better that David should receive his first news from a mere official than from a personal friend. The personal friend would be likely to enter into details that the other would not give. It is clear that Joab was ill at ease in reference to his own share in the death of Absalom. He would fain keep that back from David, at least for a time; it would be enough for him at the first to know that the battle had been gained, and that Absalom was dead.

But Ahimaaz was persistent, and after the Cushite had been despatched he carried his point, and was allowed to go. Very graphic is the description of the running of the two men and of their arrival at Mahanaim. The king had taken his place at the gate of the city, and stationed a watchman on the wall above to look out eagerly lest any one should come bringing news of the battle. In those primitive times there was no more rapid way of despatching important news than by a swift well-trained runner on foot. In the clear atmosphere of the East first one man, then another,

was seen running alone. By-and-bye, the watchman surmised that the foremost of the two was Ahimaaz; and when the king heard it, remembering his former message, he concluded that such a man must be the bearer of good tidings. As soon as he came within hearing of the king, he shouted out, "All is well." Coming close, he fell on his face and blessed God for delivering the rebels into David's hands. Before thanking him or thanking God, the king showed what was uppermost in his heart by asking, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" And here the moral courage of Ahimaaz failed him, and he gave an evasive answer: "When Joab sent the king's servant, and me thy servant, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was." When he heard this the king bade him stand aside, till he should hear what the other messenger had to say. And the official messenger was more frank than the personal friend. For when the king repeated the question about Absalom, the answer was, "The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is." The answer was couched in skilful words. It suggested the enormity of Absalom's guilt, and of the danger to the king and the state which he had plotted, and the magnitude of the deliverance, seeing that he was now beyond the power of doing further evil.

But such soothing expressions were lost upon the king. The worst fears of his heart were realized—Absalom was dead. Gone from earth for ever, beyond reach of the yearnings of his heart; gone to answer for crimes that were revolting in the sight of God and man. "The king was much moved; and he went up to the chamber over the gate and wept; and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom!

Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

He had been a man of war, a man of the sword; he had been familiar with death, and had seen it once and again in his own family; but the tidings of Absalom's death fell upon him with all the force of a first bereavement. Not more piercing is the wail of the young widow when suddenly the corpse of her beloved is borne into the house, not more overwhelming is her sensation, as if the solid earth were giving way beneath her, than the emotion that now prostrated King David.

Grief for the dead is always sacred; and however unworthy we may regard the object of it, we cannot but respect it in King David. Viewed simply as an expression of his unquenched affection for his son, and separated from its bearing on the interests of the kingdom, and from the air of repining it seemed to carry against the dispensation of God, it showed a marvellously tender and forgiving heart. In the midst of an odious and disgusting rebellion, and with the one object of seeking out his father and putting him to death, the heartless youth had been arrested and had met his deserved fate. Yet so far from showing satisfaction that the arm that had been raised to crush him was laid low in death, David could express no feelings but those of love and longing. Was it not a very wonderful love, coming very near to the feeling of Him who prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," like that "love Divine, all love excelling," that follows the sinner through all his wanderings, and clings to him amid all his rebellions; the love of Him that not merely wished in a moment of excitement that He could die for His guilty children but did die for them, and in dying bore their guilt and

took it away, and of which the brief but matchless record is that "having once loved His own that were with Him in the world, He loved them even unto the end?"

The elements of David's intense agony, when he heard of Absalom's death, were mainly three. In the first place, there was the loss of his son, of whom he could say that, with all his faults, he loved him still. A dear object had been plucked from his heart, and left it sick, vacant, desolate. A face he had often gazed on with delight lay cold in death. He had not been a good son, he had been very wicked; but affection has always its visions of a better future, and is ready to forgive unto seventy times seven. And then death is so dreadful when it fastens on the young. It seems so cruel to fell to the ground a bright young form; to extinguish by one blow his every joy, every hope, every dream; to reduce him to nothingness, so far as this life is concerned. An infinite pathos, in a father's experience, surrounds a young man's death. The regret, the longing, the conflict with the inevitable, seem to drain him of all energy, and leave him helpless in his sorrow.

Secondly, there was the terrible fact that Absalom had died in rebellion, without expressing one word of regret, without one request for forgiveness, without one act or word that it would be pleasant to recall in time to come, as a foil to the bitterness caused by his unnatural rebellion. Oh, if he had had but an hour to think of his position, to realise the lesson of his defeat, to ask his father's forgiveness, to curse the infatuation of the last few years! How would one such word have softened the sting of his rebellion in his father's breast! What a change it would have given to the aspect of his evil life! But not even the faint vestige

of such a thing was ever shown; the unmitigated glare of that evil life must haunt his father evermore!

Thirdly, there was the fact that in this rebellious condition he had passed to the judgment of God. What hope could there be for such a man, living and dying as he had done? Where could he be now? Was not "the great pit in the wood," into which his unhonoured carcase had been flung, a type of another pit, the receptacle of his soul? What agony to the Christian heart is like that of thinking of the misery of dear ones who have died impenitent and unpardoned?

To these and similar elements of grief David appears to have abandoned himself without a struggle. But was this right? Ought he not to have made some acknowledgment of the Divine hand in his trial, as he did when Bathsheba's child died? Ought he not to have acted as he did on another occasion, when he said, "I was dumb with silence, I opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it"? We have seen that in domestic matters he was not accustomed to place himself so thoroughly under the control of the Divine will as in the more public business of his life; and now we see that, when his parental feelings are crushed, he is left without the steadying influence of submission to the will of God. And in the agony of his private grief he forgets the public welfare of the nation. Noble and generous though the wish be, "Would God I had died for thee," it was on public grounds out of the question. Let us imagine for one moment the wish realized. David has fallen and Absalom survives. What sort of kingdom would it have been? What would have been the fate of the gallant men who had defended David? What would have been the condition of God's

servants throughout the kingdom? What would have been the influence of so godless a monarch upon the interests of truth and the cause of God? It was a rash and unadvised utterance of affection. But for the rough faithfulness of Joab, the consequences would have been disastrous. "The victory that day was turned into mourning, for the people heard say that day how the king was grieved for his son." Every one was discouraged. The man for whom they had risked their lives had not a word of thanks to any of them, and could think of no one but that vile son of his, who was now dead. In the evening Joab came to him, and in his blunt way swore to him that if he was not more affable to the people they would not remain a night longer in his service. Roused by the reproaches and threatenings of his general, the king did now present himself among them. The people responded and came before him, and the effort he made to show himself agreeable kept them to their allegiance, and led on to the steps for his restoration that soon took place.

But it must have been an effort to abstract his attention from Absalom, and fix it on the brighter results of the battle. And not only that night, in the silence of his chamber, but for many a night, and perhaps many a day, during the rest of his life, the thought of that battle and its crowning catastrophe must have haunted David like an ugly dream. We seem to see him in some still hour of reverie recalling early days;—happy scenes rise around him; lovely children gambol at his side; he hears again the merry laugh of little Tamar, and smiles as he recalls some childish saying of Absalom; he is beginning, as of old, to forecast the future and shape out for them careers of honour and happiness; when, horror of horrors!

the spell breaks; the bright vision gives way to dismal realities—Tamar's dishonour, Amnon's murder, Absalom's insurrection, and, last not least, Absalom's death, glare in the field of memory! Who will venture to say that David did not smart for his sins? Who that reflects would be willing to take the cup of sinful indulgence from his hands, sweet though it was in his mouth, when he sees it so bitter in the belly?

Two remarks may appropriately conclude this chapter, one with reference to grief from bereavements in general, the other with reference to the grief that may arise to Christians in connection with the spiritual condition of departed children.

1. With reference to grief from bereavements in general, it is to be observed that they will prove either a blessing or an evil according to the use to which they are turned. All grief in itself is a weakening thing—weakening both to the body and the mind, and it were a great error to suppose that it *must* do good in the end. There are some who seem to think that to resign themselves to overwhelming grief is a token of regard to the memory of the departed, and they take no pains to counteract the depressing influence. It is a painful thing to say, yet it is true, that a long-continued manifestation of overwhelming grief, instead of exciting sympathy, is more apt to cause annoyance. Not only does it depress the mourner himself, and unfit him for his duties to the living, but it depresses those that come in contact with him, and makes them think of him with a measure of impatience. And this suggests another remark. It is not right to obtrude our grief overmuch on others, especially if we are in a public position. Let us take example in this respect from our blessed Lord. Was any sorrow like unto His sorrow? Yet how little did

He obtrude it even on the notice of His disciples! It was towards the end of His ministry before He even began to tell them of the dark scenes through which He was to pass; and even when He did tell them how He was to be betrayed and crucified, it was not to court their sympathy, but to prepare them for their part of the trial. And when the overwhelming agony of Gethsemane drew on, it was only three of the twelve that were permitted to be with Him. All such considerations show that it is a more Christian thing to conceal our griefs than to make others uncomfortable by obtruding them upon their notice. David was on the very eve of losing the affections of those who had risked everything for him, by abandoning himself to anguish for his private loss, and letting his distress for the dead interfere with his duty to the living.

And how many things are there to a Christian mind fitted to abate the first sharpness even of a great bereavement. Is it not the doing of a Father, infinitely kind? Is it not the doing of Him "who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all"? You say you can see no light through it,—it is dark, all dark, fearfully dark. Then you ought to fall back on the inscrutability of God. Hear Him saying, "What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." Resign yourself patiently to His hands, till He make the needed revelation, and rest assured that when it is made it will be worthy of God. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." Meanwhile, be impressed with the vanity of this life, and the infinite need of a higher portion. "Set your affection on things above, and not on the things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ

in God. When Christ, who is your Life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory."

2. The other remark that falls to be made here concerns the grief that may arise to Christians in connection with the spiritual condition of departed children.

When the parent is either in doubt as to the happiness of a beloved one, or has cause to apprehend that the portion of that child is with the unbelievers, the pang which he experiences is one of the most acute which the human heart can know. Now here is a species of suffering which, if not peculiar to believers, falls on them far the most heavily, and is, in many cases, a haunting spectre of misery. The question naturally arises, Is it not strange that their very beliefs, as Christians, subject them to such acute sufferings? If one were a careless, unbelieving man, and one's child died without evidence of grace, one would probably think nothing of it, because the things that are unseen and eternal are never in one's thoughts. But just because one believes the testimony of God on this great subject, one becomes liable to a peculiar agony. Is this not strange indeed?

Yes, there is a mystery in it which we cannot wholly solve. But we must remember that it is in thorough accordance with a great law of Providence, the operation of which, in other matters, we cannot overlook. That law is, that the cultivation and refinement of any organ or faculty, while it greatly increases your capacity of enjoyment, increases at the same time your capacity, and it may be your occasions, of suffering. Let us take, for example, the habit of cleanliness. Where this habit prevails, there is much more enjoyment in life; but let a person of great cleanliness be surrounded by filth, his suffering is infinitely greater. Or

take the cultivation of taste, and let us say of musical taste. It adds to life an immense capacity of enjoyment, but also a great capacity and often much occasion of suffering, because bad music or tasteless music, such as one may often have to endure, creates a misery unknown to the man of no musical culture. To a man of classical taste, bad writing or bad speaking, such as is met with every day, is likewise a source of irritation and suffering. If we advance to a moral and spiritual region, we may see that the cultivation of one's ordinary affections, apart from religion, while on the whole it increases enjoyment, does also increase sorrow. If I lived and felt as a Stoic, I should enjoy family life much less than if I were tender-hearted and affectionate; but when I suffered a family bereavement I should suffer much less. These are simply illustrations of the great law of Providence that culture, while it increases happiness, increases suffering too. It is a higher application of the same law, that gracious culture, the culture of our spiritual affections under the power of the Spirit of God, in increasing our enjoyment does also increase our capacity of suffering. In reference to that great problem of natural religion, Why should a God of infinite benevolence have created creatures capable of suffering? one answer that has often been given is, that if they had not been capable of suffering they might not have been capable of enjoyment. But in pursuing these inquiries we get into an obscure region, in reference to which it is surely our duty patiently to wait for that increase of light which is promised to us in the second stage of our existence.

Yet still it remains to be asked, What comfort can there possibly be for Christian parents in such a case as David's? What possible consideration can ever

reconcile them to the thought that their beloved ones have gone to the world of woe? Are not their children parts of themselves, and how is it possible for them to be completely saved if those who are so identified with them are lost? How can they ever be happy in a future life if eternally separated from those who were their nearest and dearest on earth? On such matters it has pleased God to allow a great cloud to rest which our eyes cannot pierce. We cannot solve this problem. We cannot reconcile perfect personal happiness, even in heaven, with the knowledge that beloved ones are lost. But God must have some way, worthy of Himself, of solving the problem. And we must just wait for His time of revelation. "God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain." The Judge of all the earth must act justly. And the song which will express the deepest feelings of the redeemed, when from the sea of glass, mingled with fire, they look back on the ways of Providence toward them, will be this: "Great and marvellous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; *just and true are all Thy ways*, Thou King of saints. Who would not fear Thee and glorify Thy name, for Thou only art holy?"

CHAPTER XXV.

THE RESTORATION.

2 SAMUEL xix. 5—30.

TO rouse one's self from the prostration of grief, and grapple anew with the cares of life, is hard indeed. Among the poorer classes of society, it is hardly possible to let grief have its swing; amid suppressed and struggling emotions the poor man must return to his daily toil. The warrior, too, in the heat of conflict has hardly time to drop a tear over the tomb of his comrade or his brother. But where leisure is possible, the bereaved heart does crave a time of silence and solitude; and it seems reasonable, in order that its fever may subside a little, before the burden of daily work is resumed. It was somewhat hard upon David, then, that his grief could not get a single evening to flow undisturbed. A rough voice called him to rouse himself, and speak comfortably to his people, otherwise they would disband before morning, and all that he had gained would be lost to him again. In the main, Joab was no doubt right; but in his manner there was a sad lack of consideration for the feelings of the king. He might have remembered that, though he had gained a battle, David had lost a son, and that, too, under circumstances peculiarly heart-breaking. Faithful in the main and shrewd as Joab was, he was no doubt a useful officer;

but his harshness and want of feeling went far to neutralise the benefit of his services. It ought surely to be one of the benefits of civilisation and culture that, where painful duties have to be done, they should be done with much consideration and tenderness. For the real business of life is not so much to get right things done in any way, as to diffuse a right spirit among men, and get them to do things well. Men of enlightened goodness will always aim at purifying the springs of conduct, at increasing virtue, and deepening faith and holiness. The call to the royal bridegroom in the forty-fifth Psalm is to "gird his sword on his thigh, and ride forth prosperously, *because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness.*" To increase these three things is to increase the true wealth of nations and advance the true prosperity of kingdoms. In his eagerness to get a certain thing done, Joab showed little or no regard for those higher interests to which outward acts should ever be subordinate.

But David felt the call of duty—"He arose and sat in the gate. And they told unto all the people saying, Behold, the king doth sit in the gate. And all the people came before the king: for Israel had fled every man to his tent." And very touching it must have been to look on the sad, pale, wasted face of the king, and mark his humble, chastened bearing, and yet to receive from him words of winning kindness that showed him still caring for them and loving them, as a shepherd among his sheep; in no wise exasperated by the insurrection, not breathing forth threatenings and slaughter on those who had taken part against him; but concerned as ever for the welfare of the whole kingdom, and praying for Jerusalem, for his brethren and companions' sakes, "Peace be within thee."

It was now open to him to follow either of two courses: either to march to Jerusalem at the head of his victorious army, take military possession of the capital, and deal with the remains of the insurrection in the stern fashion common among kings; or to wait till he should be invited back to the throne from which he had been driven, and then magnanimously proclaim an amnesty to all the rebels. We are not surprised that he preferred the latter alternative. It is more agreeable to any man to be offered what is justly due to him by those who have deprived him of it than to have to claim it as his right. It was far more like him to return in peace than in that vengeful spirit that must have hecatombs of rebels slain to satisfy it. The people knew that David was in no bloodthirsty mood. And it was natural for him to expect that an advance would be made to him, after the frightful wrong which he had suffered from the people. He was therefore in no haste to leave his quarters at Mahanaim.

The movement that he looked for did take place, but it did not originate with those who might have been expected to take the lead. It was among the ten tribes of Israel that the proposal to bring him back was first discussed, and his own tribe, the tribe of Judah, held back after the rest were astir. He was much chagrined at this backwardness on the part of Judah. It was hard that his own tribe should be the last to stir, that those who might have been expected to head the movement should lag behind. But in this David was only experiencing the same thing as the Son of David a thousand years after, when the people of Nazareth, His own city, not only refused to listen to Him, but were about to hurl Him over the edge of a precipice.

So important, however, did he see it to be for the general welfare that Judah should share the movement, that he sent Zadok and Abiathar the priests to stir them up to their duty. He would not have taken this step but for his jealousy for the honour of Judah; it was the fact that the movement was now going on in some places and not in all that induced him to interfere. He dreaded disunion in any case, especially a disunion between Judah and Israel. For the jealousy between these two sections of the people that afterwards broke the kingdom into two under Jeroboam was now beginning to show itself, and, indeed, led soon after to the revolt of Sheba.

Another step was taken by David, of very doubtful expediency, in order to secure the more cordial support of the rebels. He superseded Joab, and gave the command of his army to Amasa, who had been general of the rebels. In more ways than one this was a strong measure. To supersede Joab was to make for himself a very powerful enemy, to rouse a man whose passions, when thoroughly excited, were capable of any crime. But on the other hand, David could not but be highly offended with Joab for his conduct to Absalom, and he must have looked on him as a very unsuitable coadjutor to himself in that policy of clemency that he had determined to pursue. This was significantly brought out by the appointment of Amasa in room of Joab. Both were David's nephews, and both were of the tribe of Judah; but Amasa had been at the head of the insurgents, and therefore in close alliance with the insurgents of Judah. Most probably the reason why the men of Judah hung back was that they were afraid lest, if David were restored to Jerusalem, he would make an example of them; for it was at Hebron, in the tribe of Judah, that Absalom had been first proclaimed, and the people of Jerusalem

who had favoured him were mostly of that tribe. But when it became known that the leader of the rebel forces was not only not to be punished, but actually promoted to the highest office in the king's service, all fears of that sort were completely scattered. It was an act of wonderful clemency. It was such a contrast to the usual treatment of rebels! But this king was not like other kings; he gave gifts even to the rebellious. There was no limit to his generosity. Where sin abounded grace did much more abound. Accordingly a new sense of the goodness and generosity of their ill-treated but noble king took possession of the people. "He bowed the heart of the men of Judah, even as the heart of one man, so that they sent this word unto the king, Return thou, and all thy servants." From the extreme of backwardness they started to the extreme of forwardness; the last to speak for David, they were the first to act for him; and such was their vehemence in his cause that the evil of national disunion which David dreaded from their indifference actually sprang from their over-impetuous zeal.

Thus at length David bade farewell to Mahanaim, and began his journey to Jerusalem. His route in returning was the reverse of that followed in his flight. First he descends the eastern bank of the Jordan as far as opposite Gilgal; then he strikes up through the wilderness the steep ascent to Jerusalem. At Gilgal several events of interest took place.

The first of these was the meeting with the representatives of Judah, who came to conduct the king over Jordan, and to offer him their congratulations and loyal assurances. This step was taken by the men of Judah alone, and without consultation or co-operation with the other tribes. A ferry-boat to convey the king's

household over the river, and whatever else might be required to make the passage comfortable, these men of Judah provided. Some have blamed the king for accepting these attentions from Judah, instead of inviting the attendance of all the tribes. But surely, as the king had to pass the Jordan, and found the means of transit provided for him, he was right to accept what was offered. Nevertheless, this act of Judah and its acceptance by David gave serious offence, as we shall presently see, to the other tribes.

Neither Judah nor Israel comes out well in this little incident. We get an instructive glimpse of the hot-headedness of the tribes, and the childishness of their quarrels. It is members of the same nation a thousand years afterwards that on the very eve of the Crucifixion we see disputing among themselves which of them should be the greatest. Men never appear in a dignified attitude when they are contending that on some occasion or other they have been treated with too little consideration. And yet how many of the quarrels of the world, both public and private, have arisen from this, that some one did not receive the attention which he deserved! Pride lies at the bottom of it all. And quarrels of this kind will sometimes, nay often, be found even among men calling themselves the followers of Christ. If the blessed Lord Himself had acted on this principle, what a different life He would have led! If He had taken offence at every want of etiquette, at every want of the honour due to the Son of God, when would our redemption ever have been accomplished? Was His mother treated with due consideration when forced into the stable, because there was no room for her in the inn? Was Jesus Himself treated with due honour when the people of

Nazareth took Him to the brow of the hill, or when the foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests, but the Son of Man had not where to lay His head? What if He had resented the denial of Peter, the treachery of Judas, and the forsaking of Him by all the apostles? How admirable was the humility that made Himself of no reputation, so that when He was reviled He reviled not again, when He suffered He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously! Yet how utterly opposite is the bearing of many, who are ever ready to take offence if anything is omitted to which they have a claim—standing upon their rights, claiming precedence over this one and the other, maintaining that it would never do to allow themselves to be trampled on, thinking it spirited to contend for their honours! It is because this tendency is so deeply seated in human nature that you need to be so watchful against it. It breaks out at the most unseasonable times. Could any time have been more unsuitable for it on the part of the men of Israel and Judah than when the king was giving them such a memorable example of humility, pardoning every one, great and small, that had offended him, even though their offence was as deadly as could be conceived? Or could any time have been more unsuitable for it on the part of the disciples of our Lord than when He was about to surrender His very life, and submit to the most shameful form of death that could be devised? Why do men not see that the servant is not above his lord, nor the disciple above his master? "Is not the heart deceitful above all things and desperately wicked"? Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

The next incident at Gilgal was the cringing entreaty

of Shimei, the Benjamite, to be pardoned the insult which he had offered the king when he left Jerusalem. The conduct of Shimei had been such an outrage on all decency that we wonder how he could have dared to present himself at all before David, even though, as a sort of screen, he was accompanied by a thousand Benjamites. His prostration of himself on the ground before David, his confession of his sin and abject deprecation of the king's anger, are not fitted to raise him in our estimation; they were the fruits of a base nature that can insult the fallen, but lick the dust off the feet of men in power. It was not till David had made it known that his policy was to be one of clemency that Shimei took this course; and even then he must have a thousand Benjamites at his back before he could trust himself to his mercy. Abishai, Joab's brother, would have had him slain; but his proposal was rejected by David with warmth and even indignation. He knew that his restoration was an accomplished fact, and he would not spoil a policy of forgiveness by shedding the blood of this wicked man. Not content with passing his word to Shimei, "he sware unto him." But he afterwards found that he had carried clemency too far, and in his dying charge to Solomon he had to warn him against this dangerous enemy, and instruct him to bring down his hoar head with blood. But this needs not to make us undervalue the singular quality of heart which led David to show such forbearance to one utterly unworthy. It was a strange thing in the annals of Eastern kingdoms, where all rebellion was usually punished with the most fearful severity. It brings to mind the gentle clemency of the great Son of David in His dealings, a thousand years after, with another Benjamite as he was travelling, on that very route, on

the way to Damascus, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against His disciples. Was there ever such clemency as that which met the persecutor with the words, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? Only in this case the clemency accomplished its object; in Shimei's case it did not. In the one case the persecutor became the chief of Apostles; in the other he acted more like the evil spirit in the parable, whose last end was worse than the first.

The next incident in the king's return was his meeting with Mephibosheth. He came down to meet the king, "and had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes from the day the king departed unto the day when he came again in peace." Naturally, the king's first question was an inquiry why he had not left Jerusalem with him. And Mephibosheth's reply was simply, that he had wished to do so, but, owing to his lameness, had not been able. And, moreover, Ziba had slandered him to the king when he said that Mephibosheth hoped to receive back the kingdom of his grandfather. The words of this poor man had all the appearance of an honest narrative. The ass which he intended to saddle for his own use was probably one of those which Ziba took away to present to David, so that Mephibosheth was left helpless in Jerusalem. If the narrative commends itself by its transparent truthfulness, it shows also how utterly improbable was the story of Ziba, that he had expectations of being made king. For he seems to have been as feeble in mind as he was frail in body, and he undoubtedly carried his compliments to David to a ridiculous pitch when he said, "All my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king." Was that a fit way to speak of his father Jonathan?

We cannot greatly admire one who would depreciate his family to such a degree because he desired to obtain David's favour. And for some reason David was somewhat sharp to him. No man is perfect, and we cannot but wonder that the king who was so gentle to Shimei should have been so sharp to Mephibosheth. "Why speakest thou any more of thy matters? I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land." David appears to have been irritated at discovering his mistake in believing Ziba, and hastily transferring Mephibosheth's property to him. Nothing is more common than such irritation, when men discover that through false information they have made a blunder, and gone into some arrangement that must be undone. But why did not the king restore all his property to Mephibosheth? Why say that he and Ziba were to divide it? Some have supposed (as we remarked before) that this meant simply that the old arrangement was to be continued—Ziba to till the ground, and Mephibosheth to receive as his share half the produce. But in that case Mephibosheth would not have added, "Yea, let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house." Our verdict would have been the very opposite,—Let Mephibosheth take all. But David was in a difficulty. The temper of the Benjamites was very irritable; they had never been very cordial to David, and Ziba was an important man among them. There he was, with his fifteen sons and twenty servants, a man not to be hastily set aside. For once the king appeared to prefer the rule of expediency to that of justice. To make some amends for his wrong to Mephibosheth, and at the same time not to turn Ziba into a foe, he resorted to this rough-and-ready method

of dividing the land between them. But surely it was an unworthy arrangement. Mephibosheth had been loyal, and should never have lost his land. He had been slandered by Ziba, and therefore deserved some solace for his wrong. David restores but half his land, and has no soothing word for the wrong he has done him. Strange that when so keenly sensible of the wrong done to himself when he lost his kingdom unrighteously, he should not have seen the wrong he had done to Mephibosheth. And strange that when his whole kingdom had been restored to himself, he should have given back but half to Jonathan's son.

The incident connected with the meeting with Barzillai we reserve for separate consideration.

Amid the greatest possible diversity of circumstance, we are constantly finding parallels in the life of David to that of Him who was his Son according to the flesh. Our Lord can hardly be said to have ever been driven from His kingdom. The hosannahs of to-day were indeed very speedily exchanged into the "Away with Him! away with Him! Crucify Him! crucify Him!" of to-morrow. But what we may remark of our Lord is rather that He has been kept out of His kingdom than driven from it. He who came to redeem the world, and of whom the Father said, "Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion," has never been suffered to exercise His sovereignty, at least in a conspicuous manner and on a universal scale. Here is a truth that ought to be a constant source of humiliation and sorrow to every Christian. Are you to be content that the rightful Sovereign should be kept in the background, and the great ruling forces of the world should be selfishness, and mammon, and pleasure, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life? Why speak

ye not of bringing the King back to His house? You say you can do so little. But every subject of King David might have said the same. The question is, not whether you are doing much or little, but whether you are doing what you can. Is the exaltation of Jesus Christ to the supreme rule of the world an object dear to you? Is it matter of humiliation and concern to you that He does not occupy that place? Do you humbly try to give it to Him in your own heart and life? Do you try to give it to Him in the Church, in the State, in the world? The supremacy of Jesus Christ must be the great rallying cry of the members of the Christian Church, whatever their denomination. It is a point on which surely all ought to be agreed, and agreement there might bring about agreement in other things. Let us give our minds and hearts to realise in our spheres that glorious plan of which we read in the first chapter of Ephesians: "That, in the dispensation of the fulness of time, God might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in Him, in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things according to the counsel of His own will, that we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ."

CHAPTER XXVI.

DAVID AND BARZILLAI.

2 SAMUEL xix. 31—40.

IT is very refreshing to fall in with a man like Barzillai in a record which is so full of wickedness, and without many features of a redeeming character. He is a sample of humanity at its best—one of those men who diffuse radiance and happiness wherever their influence extends. Long before St. Peter wrote his epistle, he had been taught by the one Master to "put away all wickedness, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and evil-speakings;" and he had adopted St. Paul's rule for rich men, "that they do good, that they be rich in good works, that they be ready to distribute, willing to communicate." We cannot well conceive a greater contrast than that between Barzillai and another rich farmer with whom David came in contact at an earlier period of his life—Nabal of Carmel: the one niggardly, beggarly, and bitter, not able even to acknowledge an obligation, far less to devise anything liberal, adding insult to injury when David modestly stated his claim, humiliating him before his messengers, and meeting his request with a flat refusal of everything great or small; the other hastening from his home when he heard of David's distress, carrying with him

whatever he could give for the use of the king and his followers, continuing to send supplies while he was at Mahanaim, and now returning to meet him on his way to Jerusalem, conduct him over Jordan, and show his loyalty and goodwill in every available way. While we grieve that there are still so many Nabals let us bless God that there are Barzillais too.

Of Barzillai's previous history we know nothing. We do not even know where Rogelim, his place of abode, was, except that it was among the mountains of Gilead. The facts stated regarding him are few, but suggestive.

1. He was "a very great man." The expression seems to imply that he was both rich and influential. Dwelling among the hills of Gilead, his only occupation, and main way of becoming rich, must have been as a farmer. The two and a half tribes that settled on the east of the Jordan, while they had a smaller share of national and spiritual privileges, were probably better provided in a temporal sense. That part of the country was richer in pasturage, and therefore better adapted for cattle. It is probable, too, that the allotments were much larger. The kingdoms of Sihon and Og, especially the latter, were of wide extent. If the two and a half tribes had been able thoroughly to subdue the original inhabitants, they would have had possessions of great extent and value. Barzillai's ancestors had probably received a valuable and extensive allotment, and had been strong enough and courageous enough to keep it for themselves. Consequently, when their flocks and herds multiplied, they were not restrained within narrow dimensions, but could spread over the mountains round about. But however his riches may have been acquired, Barzillai was evidently

a man of very large means. He was rich apparently both in flocks and servants, a kind of chief or sheikh, not only with a large establishment of his own, but enjoying the respect, and in some degree able to command the services, of many of the humble people around him.

2. His generosity was equal to his wealth. The catalogue of the articles which he and another friend of David's brought him in his extremity (2 Sam. xvii. 28, 29) is instructive from its minuteness and its length. Like all men liberal in heart, he devised liberal things. He did not ask to see a subscription list, or inquire what other people were giving. He did not consider what was the smallest amount that he could give without appearing to be shabby. His only thought seems to have been, what there was he had to give that could be of use to the king. It is this large inborn generosity manifested to David that gives one the assurance that he was a kind, generous helper wherever there was a case deserving and needing his aid. We class him with the patriarch of Uz, with whom no doubt he could have said, "When the eye saw me, then it blessed me, and when the ear heard me, it bare witness unto me; the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I made the widow's heart to leap for joy."

3. His loyalty was not less thorough than his generosity. When he heard of the king's troubles, he seems never to have hesitated one instant as to throwing in his lot with him. It mattered not that the king was in great trouble, and apparently in a desperate case. Neighbours, or even members of his own family, might have whispered to him that it would be better not to commit himself, seeing the rebellion was so

strong. He was living in a sequestered part of the country; there was no call on him to declare himself at that particular moment; and if Absalom got the upper hand, he would be sure to punish severely those who had been active on his father's side. But none of these things moved him. Barzillai was no sunshine courtier, willing to enjoy the good things of the court in days of prosperity, but ready in darker days to run off and leave his friends in the midst of danger. He was one of those true men that are ready to risk their all in the cause of loyalty when persuaded that it is the cause of truth and right. We cannot but ask, What could have given him a feeling so strong? We are not expressly told that he was a man deeply moved by the fear of God, but we have every reason to believe it. If so, the consideration that would move him most forcibly in favour of David must have been that he was God's anointed. God had called him to the throne, and had never declared, as in the case of Saul, that he had forfeited it; the attempt to drive him from it was of the devil, and therefore to be resisted to the last farthing of his property, and if he had been a younger man, to the last drop of his blood. Risk? Can you frighten a man like this by telling him of the risk he runs by supporting David in the hour of adversity? Why, he is ready not only to risk all, but to lose all, if necessary, in a cause which appears so obviously to be Divine, all the more because he sees so well what a blessing David has been to the country. Why, he has actually made the kingdom. Not only has he expelled all its internal foes, but he has cowed those troublesome neighbours that were constantly pouncing upon the tribes, and especially the tribes situated in Gilead and Bashan. Moreover, he has given unity and stability to all the internal

arrangements of the kingdom. See what a grand capital he has made for it at Jerusalem. Look how he has planted the ark on the strongest citadel of the country, safe from every invading foe. Consider how he has perfected the arrangements for the service of the Levites, what a delightful service of song he has instituted, and what beautiful songs he has composed for the use of the sanctuary. Doubtless it was considerations of this kind that roused Barzillai to such a pitch of loyalty. And is not a country happy that has such citizens, men who place their personal interest far below the public weal, and are ready to make any sacrifice, of person or of property, when the highest interests of their country are concerned? We do not plead for the kind of loyalty that clings to a monarch simply because he is king, apart from all considerations, personal and public, bearing on his worthiness or unworthiness of the office. We plead rather for the spirit that makes duty to country stand first, and personal or family interest a long way below. We deprecate the spirit that sneers at the very idea of putting one's self to loss or trouble of any kind for the sake of public interests. We long for a generation of men and women that, like many in this country in former days, are willing to give "all for the Church and a little less for the State." And surely in these days, when no deadly risk is incurred, the demand is not so very severe. Let Christian men lay it on their consciences to pay regard to the claims under which they lie to serve their country. Whether it be in the way of serving on some public board, or fighting against some national vice, or advancing some great public interest, let it be considered even by busy men that their country, and must add, their Church, have true

claims upon them. Even heathens and unbelievers have said, "It is sweet and glorious to die for one's country." It is a poor state of things when in a Christian community men are so sunk in indolence and selfishness that they will not stir a finger on its behalf.

4. Barzillai was evidently a man of attractive personal qualities. The king was so attracted by him, that he wished him to come with him to Jerusalem, and promised to sustain him at court. The heart of King David was not too old to form new attachments. And towards Barzillai he was evidently drawn. We can hardly suppose but that there were deeper qualities to attract the king than even his loyalty and generosity. It looks as if David perceived a spiritual congeniality that would make Barzillai, not only a pleasant inmate, but a profitable friend. For indeed in many ways Barzillai and David seem to have been like one another. God had given them both a warm, sunny nature. He had prospered them in the world. He had given them a deep regard for Himself and delight in His fellowship. David must have found in Barzillai a friend whose views on the deepest subjects were similar to his own. At Jerusalem the men who were of his mind were by no means too many. To have Barzillai beside him, refreshing him with his experiences of God's ways and joining with him in songs of praise and thanksgiving, would be delightful. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" But however pleasant the prospect may have been to David, it was not one destined to be realized.

5. For Barzillai was not dazzled even by the highest offers of the king, because he felt that the proposal was

unsuitable for his years. He was already eighty, and every day was adding to his burden, and bringing him sensibly nearer the grave. Even though he might be enjoying a hale old age, he could not be sure that he would not break down suddenly, and thus become an utter burden to the king. David had made the offer as a compliment to Barzillai, although it might also be a favour to himself, and as a compliment the aged Gileadite was entitled to view it. And viewing it in that light, he respectfully declined it. He was a home-loving man, his habits had been formed for a quiet domestic sphere, and it was too late to change them. His faculties were losing their sharpness; his taste had become dulled, his ear blunted, so that both savoury dishes and elaborate music would be comparatively thrown away on him. The substance of his answer was, I am an old man, and it would be unsuitable in me to begin a courtier's life. In a word, he understood what was suitable for old age. Many a man and woman too, perhaps, even of Barzillai's years, would have jumped at King David's offer, and rejoiced to share the dazzling honours of a court, and would have affected youthful feelings and habits in order to enjoy the exhilaration and the excitement of a courtier's life. In Barzillai's choice, we see the predominance of a sanctified common sense, alive to the proprieties of things, and able to see how the enjoyment most suitable to an advanced period of life might best be had. It was not by aping youth or grasping pleasures for which the relish had gone. Some may think this a painful view of old age. Is it so that as years multiply the taste for youthful enjoyments passes away, and one must resign one's self to the thought that life itself is near its end? Undoubtedly it is. But even a

heathen could show that this is by no means an evil. The purpose of Cicero's beautiful treatise on old age, written when he was sixty-two, but regarded as spoken by Cato at the age of eighty-four, was to show that the objections commonly brought against old age were not really valid. These objections were—that old age unfits men for active business, that it renders the body feeble, that it deprives them of the enjoyment of almost all pleasures, and that it heralds the approach of death. Let it be granted, is the substance of Cicero's argument; nevertheless, old age brings enjoyments of a new order that compensate for those which it withdraws. If we have wisdom to adapt ourselves to our position, and to lay ourselves out for those compensatory pleasures, we shall find old age not a burden, but a joy. Now, if even a heathen could argue in that way, how much more a Christian! If he cannot personally be so lively as before, he may enjoy the young life of his children and grandchildren or other young friends, and delight to see them enjoying what he cannot now engage in. If active pleasures are not to be had, there are passive enjoyments—the conversation of friends, reading, meditation, and the like—of which all the more should be made. If one world is gliding from him, another is moving towards him. As the outward man perisheth, let the inward man be renewed day by day.

There are few more jarring scenes in English history than the last days of Queen Elizabeth. As life was passing away, a historian of England says, "she clung to it with a fierce tenacity. She hunted, she danced, she jested with her young favourites, she coquetted, and frolicked, and scolded at sixty-seven as she had done at thirty." "The Queen," wrote a courtier, "a few months

before her death was never so gallant these many years, nor so set upon jollity." She persisted, in spite of opposition, in her gorgeous progresses from country house to country house. She clung to business as of old, and rated in her usual fashion one "who minded not to giving up some matter of account." And then a strange melancholy settled on her. Her mind gave way, and food and rest became alike distasteful. Clever woman, yet very foolish in not discerning how vain it was to attempt to carry the brisk habits of youth into old age, and most profoundly foolish in not having taken pains to provide for old age the enjoyments appropriate to itself! How differently it has fared with those who have been wise in time and made the best provision for old age! "I have waited for Thy salvation, O my God," says the dying Jacob, relieved and happy to think that the object for which he had waited had come at last. "I am now ready to be offered," says St. Paul, "and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing." Which is the better portion—he whose old age is spent in bitter lamentation over the departed joys and brightness of his youth? or he whose sun goes down with the sweetness and serenity of an autumn sunset, but only to rise in a brighter world, and shine forth in the glory of immortal youth?

6. Holding such views of old age, it was quite natural and suitable for Barzillai to ask for his son Chimham what he respectfully declined for himself. For his declinature was not a rude rejection of an honour

deemed essentially false and vain. Barzillai did not tell the king that he had lived to see the folly and the sin of those pleasures which in the days of youth and inexperience men are so greedy to enjoy. That would have been an affront to David, especially as he was now getting to be an old man himself. He recognised that a livelier mode of life than befitted the old was suitable for the young. The advantages of residence at the court of David were not to be thought little of by one beginning life, especially where the head of the court was such a man as David, himself so affectionate and attractive, and so deeply imbued with the fear and love of God. The narrative is so short that not a word is added as to how it fared with Chimham when he came to Jerusalem. Only one thing is known of him: it is said that, after the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, when Johanan conducted to Egypt a remnant of Jews that he had saved from the murderous hand of Ishmael, "they departed and dwelt in the habitation of Chimham, which is by Bethlehem, to go into Egypt." We infer that David bestowed on Chimham some part of his paternal inheritance at Bethlehem. The vast riches which he had amassed would enable him to make ample provision for his sons; but we might naturally have expected that the whole of the paternal inheritance would have remained in the family. For some reason unknown to us, Chimham seems to have got a part of it. We cannot but believe that David would desire to have a good man there, and it is much in favour of Chimham that he should have got a settlement at Bethlehem. And there is another circumstance that tells in his favour: during the five centuries that elapsed between David's time and the Captivity, the name of Chimham remained

in connection with that property, and even so late as the time of Jeremiah it was called "Chimham's habitation." Men do not thus keep alive dishonoured names, and the fact that Chimham's was thus preserved would seem to indicate that he was one of those of whom it is said, "The memory of the just is blessed."

Plans for life were speedily formed in those countries; and as Rebekah wished no delay in accompanying Abraham's servant to be the wife of Isaac, nor Ruth in going forth with Naomi to the land of Judah, so Chimham at once went with the king. The interview between David and Barzillai was ended in the way that in those countries was the most expressive sign of regard and affection: "David kissed Barzillai," but "Chimham went on with him."

The meeting with Barzillai and the finding of a new son in Chimham must have been looked back on by David with highly pleasant feelings. In every sense of the term, he had lost a son in Absalom; he seems now to find one in Chimham. We dare not say that the one was compensation for the other. Such a blank as the death of Absalom left in the heart of David could never be filled up from any earthly source whatever. Blanks of that nature can be filled only when God gives a larger measure of His own presence and His own love. But besides feeling very keenly the blank of Absalom's death, David must have felt distressed at the loss as it seemed, of power, to secure the affections of the younger generation of his people, many of whom, there is every reason to believe, had followed Absalom. The ready way in which Chimham accepted of the proposal in regard to him would therefore be a pleasant incident in his experience; and the remembrance of his father's fast attachment and most useful friendship would

ever be in David's memory like an oasis in the desert.

We return for a moment to the great lesson of this passage. Aged men, it is a lesson for you. Titus was instructed to exhort the aged men of Crete to be "sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience." It is a grievous thing to see grey hairs dishonoured. It is a humiliating sight when Noah excites either the shame or the derision of his sons. But "the hoary head is a crown of glory if it is found in the way of uprightness." And the crown is described in the six particulars of the exhortation to Titus. It is a crown of six jewels. Jewel the first is "sobriety," meaning here self-command, self-control, ability to stand erect before temptation, and calmness under provocation and trial. Jewel the second is "gravity," not sternness, nor sullenness, nor censoriousness, but the bearing of one who knows that "life is real, life is earnest," in opposition to the frivolous tone of those who act as if there were no life to come. Jewel the third is "temperance," especially in respect of bodily indulgence, keeping under the body, never letting it be master, but in all respects a servant. Jewel the fourth, "soundness in faith," holding the true doctrine of eternal life, and looking forward with hope and expectation to the inheritance of the future. Jewel the fifth, "soundness in charity," the charity of the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, itself a coruscation of the brightest gem in the Christian cabinet. Jewel the sixth, "soundness in patience," that grace so needful, but so often neglected, that grace that gives an air of serenity to one's character, that allies it to heaven, that gives it sublimity, that bears the unbearable, and hopes and rejoices on the very edge of despair.

Onward, then, ye aged men, in this glorious path! By God's grace, gather round your head these incorruptible jewels, which shine with the lustre of God's holiness, and which are the priceless gems of heaven. Happy are ye, if indeed you have these jewels for your crown; and happy is your Church where the aged men are crowned with glory like the four-and-twenty elders before the throne!

But what of those who dishonour God, and their own grey hairs, and the Church of Christ by stormy tempers, profane tongues, drunken orgies, and disorderly lives? "O my soul, come not thou into their secret! To their assembly, mine honour be not thou united!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE INSURRECTION OF SHEBA.

2 SAMUEL xix. 41—43; xx.

DAVID was now virtually restored to his kingdom; but he had not even left Gilgal when fresh troubles began. The jealousy between Judah and Israel broke out in spite of him. The cause of complaint was on the part of the ten tribes; they were offended at not having been waited for to take part in escorting the king to Jerusalem. First, the men of Israel, in harsh language, accused the men of Judah of having stolen the king away, because they had transported him over the Jordan. To this the men of Judah replied that the king was of their kin; therefore they had taken the lead, but they had received no special reward or honour in consequence. The men of Israel, however, had an argument in reply to this: they were ten tribes, and therefore had so much more right to the king; and Judah had treated them with contempt in not consulting or co-operating with them in bringing him back. It is added that the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.

It is in a poor and paltry light that both sides appear in this inglorious dispute. There was no solid grievance whatever, nothing that might not have been easily settled if the soft answer that turneth away

wrath had been resorted to instead of fierce and exasperating words. Alas! that miserable tendency of our nature to take offence when we think we have been overlooked,—what mischief and misery has it bred in the world! The men of Israel were foolish to take offence; but the men of Judah were neither magnanimous nor forbearing in dealing with their unreasonable humour. The noble spirit of clemency that David had shown awakened but little permanent response. The men of Judah, who were foremost in Absalom's rebellion, were like the man in the parable that had been forgiven ten thousand talents, but had not the generosity to forgive the trifling offence committed against them, as they thought, by their brethren of Israel. So they seized their fellow-servant by the throat and demanded that he should pay them the uttermost farthing. Judah played false to his national character; for he was not "he whom his brethren should praise."

What was the result? Any one acquainted with human nature might have foretold it with tolerable certainty. Given on one side a proneness to take offence, a readiness to think that one has been overlooked, and on the other a want of forbearance, a readiness to retaliate,—it is easy to see that the result will be a serious breach. It is just what we witness so often in children. One is apt to be dissatisfied, and complains of ill-treatment; another has no forbearance, and retorts angrily: the result is a quarrel, with this difference, that while the quarrels of children pass quickly away, the quarrels of nations or of factions last miserably long.

Much inflammable material being thus provided, a casual spark speedily set it on fire. Sheba, an artful

Benjamite, raised the standard of revolt against David, and the excited ten tribes, smarting with the fierce words of the men of Judah, flocked to his standard. Most miserable proceeding! The quarrel had begun about a mere point of etiquette, and now they cast off God's anointed king, and that, too, after the most signal token of God's anger had fallen on Absalom and his rebellious crew. There are many wretched enough slaveries in this world, but the slavery of pride is perhaps the most mischievous and humiliating of all.

And here it cannot be amiss to call attention to the very great neglect of the rules and spirit of Christianity that is apt, even at the present day, to show itself among professing Christians in connection with their disputes. This is so very apparent that one is apt to think that the settlement of quarrels is the very last matter to which Christ's followers learn to apply the example and instructions of their Master. When men begin in earnest to follow Christ, they usually pay considerable attention to certain of His precepts; they turn away from scandalous sins, they observe prayer, they show some interest in Christian objects, and they abandon some of the more frivolous ways of the world. But alas! when they fall into differences, they are prone in dealing with them to leave all Christ's precepts behind them. See in what an unlovely and unloving spirit the controversies of Christians have usually been conducted; how much of bitterness and personal animosity they show, how little forbearance and generosity; how readily they seem to abandon themselves to the impulses of their own hearts. Controversy rouses temper, and temper creates a tempest through which you cannot see clearly. And how many are the

quarrels in Churches or congregations that are carried on with all the heat and bitterness of unsanctified men! How much offence is taken at trifling neglects or mistakes! Who remembers, even in its spirit, the precept in the Sermon on the Mount, "If any man smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also"? Who remembers the beatitude, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God"? Who bears in mind the Apostle's horror at the unseemly spectacle of saints carrying their quarrels to heathen tribunals, instead of settling them as Christians quietly among themselves? Who weighs the earnest counsel, "Endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"? Who prizes our gracious Lord's most blessed legacy, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you"? Do not all such texts show that it is incumbent on Christians to be most careful and watchful, when any difference arises, to guard against carnal feeling of every kind, and strive to the very utmost to manifest the spirit of Christ? Yet is it not at such times that they are most apt to leave all their Christianity behind them, and engage in unseemly wrangles with one another? Does not the devil very often get it all his own way, whoever may be in the right, and whoever in the wrong? And is not frequent occasion given thereby to the enemy to blaspheme, and, in the very circumstances that should bring out in clear and strong light the true spirit of Christianity, is there not often, in place of that, an exhibition of rudeness and bitterness that makes the world ask, What better are Christians than other men?

But let us return to King David and his people. The author of the insurrection was "a man of Belial,

whose name was Sheba." He is called "the son of Bichri, a Benjamite." Benjamin had a son whose name was Becher, and the adjective formed from that would be Bichrite; some have thought that Bichri denotes not his father, but his family. Saul appears to have been of the same family (see *Speaker's Commentary in loco*). It is thus quite possible that Sheba was a relation of Saul, and that he had always cherished a grudge against David for taking the throne which he had filled. Here, we may remark in passing, would have been a real temptation to Mephibosheth to join an insurrection, for if this had succeeded he was the man who would naturally have become king. But there is no reason to believe that Mephibosheth favoured Sheba, and therefore no reason to doubt the truth of the account he gave of himself to David. The war-cry of Sheba was an artful one—"We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse." It was a scornful and exaggerated mockery of the claim that Judah had asserted as being of the same tribe with the king, whereas the other tribes stood in no such relation to him. "Very well," was virtually the cry of Sheba—"if we have no part in David, neither any inheritance in the son of Jesse, let us get home as fast as possible, and leave his friends, the tribe of Judah, to make of him what they can." It was not so much a setting up of a new rebellion as a scornful repudiation of all interest in the existing king. Instead of going with David from Gilgal to Jerusalem, they went up every man to his tent or to his home. It is not said that they intended actively to oppose David, and from this part of the narrative we should suppose that all that they intended was to make a public protest against the unworthy treat-

ment which they held that they had received. It must have greatly disturbed the pleasure of David's return to Jerusalem that this unseemly secession occurred by the way. A chill must have fallen upon his heart just as it was beginning to recover its elasticity. And much anxiety must have haunted him as to the issue — whether or not the movement would go on to another insurrection like Absalom's; or whether, having discharged their dissatisfied feeling, the people of Israel would return sullenly to their allegiance.

Nor could the feelings of King David be much soothed when he re-entered his home. The greater part of his family had been with him in his exile, and when he returned his house was occupied by the ten women whom he had left to keep it, and with whom Absalom had behaved dishonourably. And here was another trouble resulting from the rebellion that could not be adjusted in a satisfactory way. The only way of disposing of them was to put them in ward, to shut them up in confinement, to wear out the rest of their lives in a dreary, joyless widowhood. All joy and brightness was thus taken out of their lives, and personal freedom was denied them. They were doomed, for no fault of theirs, to the weary lot of captives, cursing the day, probably, when their beauty had brought them to the palace, and wishing that they could exchange lots with the humblest of their sisters that breathed the air of freedom. Strange that, with all his spiritual instincts, David could not see that a system which led to such miserable results must lie under the curse of God!

As events proceeded, it appeared that active mischief was likely to arise from Sheba's movement. He was accompanied by a body of followers, and the king was

afraid lest he should get into some fenced city, and escape the correction which his wickedness deserved. He accordingly sent Amasa to assemble the men of Judah, and return within three days. This was Amasa's first commission after his being appointed general of the troops. Whether he found the people unwilling to go out again immediately to war, or whether they were unwilling to accept him as their general, we are not told, but certainly he tarried longer than the time appointed. Thereupon the king, who was evidently alarmed at the serious dimensions which the insurrection of Sheba was assuming, sent for Abishai, Joab's brother, and ordered him to take what troops were ready and start immediately to punish Sheba. Abishai took "Joab's men, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites, and all the mighty men." With these he went out from Jerusalem to pursue after Sheba. How Joab conducted himself on this occasion is a strange but characteristic chapter of his history. It does not appear that he had any dealings with David, or that David had any dealings with him. He simply went out with his brother, and, being a man of the strongest will and greatest daring, he seems to have resolved on some fit occasion to resume his command in spite of all the king's arrangements.

They had not gone farther from Jerusalem than the Pool of Gibeon when they were overtaken by Amasa, followed doubtless by his troops. When Joab and Amasa met, Joab, actuated by jealousy towards him as having superseded him in the command of the army, treacherously slew him, leaving his dead body on the ground, and, along with Abishai, prepared to give pursuit after Sheba. An officer of Joab's was stationed beside Amasa's dead body, to call on the soldiers, when they

saw that their chief was dead, to follow Joab as the friend of David. But the sight of the dead body of Amasa only made them stand still—horrified, most probably, at the crime of Joab, and unwilling to place themselves under one who had been guilty of such a crime. The body of Amasa was accordingly removed from the highway into the field, and his soldiers were then ready enough to follow Joab. Joab was now in undisturbed command of the whole force, having set aside all David's arrangements as completely as if they had never been made. Little did David thus gain by superseding Joab and appointing Amasa in his room. The son of Zeruiah proved himself again too strong for him. The hideous crime by which he got rid of his rival was nothing to him. How he could reconcile all this with his duty to his king we are unable to see. No doubt he trusted to the principle that "success succeeds," and believed firmly that if he were able entirely to suppress Sheba's insurrection and return to Jerusalem with the news that every trace of the movement was obliterated, David would say nothing of the past, and silently restore the general who, with all his faults, did so well in the field.

Sheba was quite unable to offer opposition to the force that was thus led against him. He retreated northwards from station to station, passing in succession through the different tribes, until he came to the extreme northern border of the land. There, in a town called Abel-beth-Maachah, he took refuge, till Joab and his forces, accompanied by the Berites, a people of whom we know nothing, having overtaken him at Abel, besieged the town. Works were raised for the purpose of capturing Abel, and an assault was made on the wall for the purpose of throwing it down. Then a

woman, gifted with the wisdom for which the place was proverbial, came to Joab to remonstrate against the siege. The ground of her remonstrance was that the people of Abel had done nothing on account of which their city should be destroyed. Joab, she said, was trying to destroy "a city and a mother in Israel," and thereby to swallow up the inheritance of the Lord. In what sense was Joab seeking to destroy a *mother* in Israel? The word seems to be used to denote a mother-city or district capital, on which other places were depending. What you are trying to destroy is not a mere city of Israel, but a city which has its family of dependent villages, all of which must share in the ruin if we are destroyed. But Joab assured the woman that he had no such desire. All that he wished was to get at Sheba, who had taken refuge within the city. If that be all, said the woman, I will engage to throw his head to thee over the wall. It was the interest of the people of the city to get rid of the man who was bringing them into so serious a danger. It was not difficult for them to get Sheba decapitated, and to throw his head over the wall to Joab. By this means the conspiracy was ended. As in Absalom's case, the death of the leader was the ruin of the cause. No further stand was made by any one. Indeed, it is probable that the great body of Sheba's followers had fallen away from him in the course of his northern flight, and that only a handful were with him in Abel. So "Joab blew a trumpet, and they retired from the city, every man to his tent. And Joab returned unto Jerusalem, to the king."

Thus, once again, the land had rest from war. At the close of the chapter we have a list of the chief officers of the kingdom, similar to that given in

ch. viii. at the close of David's foreign wars. It would appear that, peace being again restored, pains were taken by the king to improve and perfect the arrangements for the administration of the kingdom. The changes on the former list are not very numerous. Joab was again at the head of the army; Benaiah, as before, commanded the Cherethites and the Pelethites; Jehoshaphat was still recorder; Sheva (same as Seraiah) was scribe; and Zadok and Abiathar were priests. In two cases there was a change. A new office had been instituted—"Adoram was over the tribute;" the subjugation of so many foreign states which had to pay a yearly tribute to David called for this change. In the earlier list it is said that the king's sons were chief rulers. No mention is made of king's sons now; the chief ruler is Ira the Jairite. On the whole, there was little change; at the close of this war the kingdom was administered in the same manner and almost by the same men as before.

There is nothing to indicate that the kingdom was weakened in its external relations by the two insurrections that had taken place against David. It is to be observed that both of them were of very short duration. Between Absalom's proclamation of himself at Hebron and his death in the wood of Ephraim there must have been a very short interval, not more than a fortnight. The insurrection of Sheba was probably all over in a week. Foreign powers could scarcely have heard of the beginning of the revolts before they heard of the close of them. There would be nothing therefore to give them any encouragement to rebel against David, and they do not appear to have made any such attempt. But in another and higher sense these revolts left painful consequences behind them. The chastening to

which David was exposed in connection with them was very humbling. His glory as king was seriously impaired. It was humiliating that he should have had to fly from before his own son. It was hardly less humiliating that he was seen to lie so much at the mercy of Joab. He is unable to depose Joab, and when he tries to do so, Joab not only kills his successor, but takes possession by his own authority of the vacant place. And David can say nothing. In this relation of David to Joab we have a sample of the trials of kings. Nominally supreme, they are often the servants of their ministers and officers. Certainly David was not always his own master. Joab was really above him; frustrated, doubtless, some excellent plans; did great service by his rough patriotism and ready valour, but injured the good name of David and the reputation of his government by his daring crimes. The retrospect of this period of his reign could have given little satisfaction to the king, since he had to trace it, with all its calamities and sorrows, to his own evil conduct. And yet what David suffered, and what the nation suffered, was not, strictly speaking, the punishment of his sin. God had forgiven him his sin. David had sung, "Blessed is the man whose iniquity is forgiven, whose sin is covered." What he now suffered was not the visitation of God's wrath, but a fatherly chastening, designed to deepen his contrition and quicken his vigilance. And surely we may say, If the fatherly chastening was so severe, what would the Divine retribution have been? If these things were done in the green tree, what would have been done in the dry? If David, even though forgiven, could not but shudder at all the terrible results of that course of sin which began with his allowing himself to lust after

Bathsheba, what must be the feeling of many a lost soul, in the world of woe, recalling its first step in open rebellion against God, and thinking of all the woes, innumerable and unutterable, that have sprung therefrom? Oh, sin, how terrible a curse thou bringest! What serpents spring up from the dragon's teeth! And how awful the fate of those who awake all too late to a sense of what thou art! Grant, O God, of Thine infinite mercy, that we all may be wise in time; that we may ponder the solemn truth, that "the wages of sin is death"; and that, without a day's delay, we may flee for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us, and find peace in believing on Him who came to take sin away by the sacrifice of Himself!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FAMINE.

2 Samuel xxi. 1—14.

WE now enter on the concluding part of the reign of David. Some of the matters in which he was most occupied during this period are recorded only in Chronicles. Among these, the chief was his preparations for the building of the temple, which great work was to be undertaken by his son. In the concluding part of Samuel the principal things recorded are two national judgments, a famine and a pestilence, that occurred in David's reign, the one springing from a transaction in the days of Saul, the other from one in the days of David. Then we have two very remarkable lyrical pieces, one a general song of thanksgiving, forming a retrospect of his whole career; the other a prophetic vision of the great Ruler that was to spring from him, and the effects of His reign. In addition to these, there is also a notice of certain wars of David's, not previously recorded, and a fuller statement respecting his great men than we have elsewhere. The whole of this section has more the appearance of a collection of pieces than a chronological narrative. It is by no means certain that they are all recorded in the order of their occurrence. The most characteristic of the pieces are the two songs or psalms—the

one looking back, the other looking forward; the one commemorating the goodness and mercy that had followed him all the days of his life, the other picturing goodness still greater and mercy more abundant, yet to be vouchsafed under David's Son.

The conjunction "then" at the beginning of the chapter is replaced in the Revised Version by "and." It does not denote that what is recorded here took place immediately after what goes before. On the contrary, the note of time is found in the general expression, "in the days of David," that is, some time in David's reign. On obvious grounds, most recent commentators are disposed to place this occurrence comparatively early. It is likely to have happened while the crime of Saul was yet fresh in the public recollection. By the close of David's reign a new generation had come to maturity, and the transactions of Saul's reign must have been comparatively forgotten. It is clear from David's excepting Mephibosheth, that the transaction occurred after he had been discovered and cared for. Possibly the narrative of the discovery of Mephibosheth may also be out of chronological order, and that event may have occurred earlier than is commonly thought. It will remove some of the difficulties of this difficult chapter if we are entitled to place the occurrence at a time not very far remote from the death of Saul.

It was altogether a singular occurrence, this famine in the land of Israel. The calamity was remarkable, the cause was remarkable, the cure most remarkable of all. The whole narrative is painful and perplexing; it places David in a strange light,—it seems to place even God Himself in a strange light; and the only way in which we can explain it, in consistency with

a righteous government, is by laying great stress on a principle accepted without hesitation in those Eastern countries, which made the father and his children "one concern," and held the children liable for the misdeeds of the father.

1. As to the calamity. It was a famine that continued three successive years, causing necessarily an increase of misery year after year. There is a presumption that it occurred in the earlier part of David's reign, because, if it had been after the great enlargement of the kingdom which followed his foreign wars, the resources of some parts of it would probably have availed to supply the deficiency. At first it does not appear that the king held that there was any special significance in the famine,—that it came as a reproof for any particular sin. But when the famine extended to a third year, he was persuaded that it must have a special cause. Did he not in this just act as we all are disposed to do? A little trial we deem to be nothing; it does not seem to have any significance or to be connected with any lesson. It is only when the little trial swells into a large one, or the brief trouble into a long-continued affliction, that we begin to inquire why it was sent. If small trials were more regarded, heavy trials would be less needed. The horse that springs forward at the slightest touch of the whip or prick of the spur needs no heavy lash; it is only when the lighter stimulus fails that the heavier has to be applied. Man's tendency, even under God's chastenings, has ever been to ignore the source of them,—when God "poured upon him the fury of His anger and the strength of battle, and it set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart" (Isa. xlii. 25). Trials

would neither be so long nor so severe if more regard were had to them in an earlier stage; if they were accepted more as God's message—"Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Consider your ways."

2. The cause of the calamity was made known when David inquired of the Lord—"It is for Saul and his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites."

The history of the crime for which this famine was sent can be gathered only from incidental notices. It appears from the narrative before us that Saul "consumed the Gibeonites, and devised against them that they should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel." The Gibeonites, as is well known, were a Canaanite people, who, through a cunning stratagem, obtained leave from Joshua to dwell in their old settlements, and being protected by a solemn national oath, were not disturbed even when it was found out that they had been practising a fraud. They possessed cities, situated principally in the tribe of Benjamin; the chief of them, Gibeon, "was a great city, one of the royal cities, greater than Ai." In the time of Saul they were a quiet, inoffensive people; yet he seems to have fallen on them with a determination to sweep them from all the coasts of Israel. Death or banishment was the only alternative he offered. His desire to exterminate them evidently failed, otherwise David would have found none of them to consult; but the savage attack which he made on them affords an incidental proof that it was no feeling of humanity that led him to spare the Amalekites when he was ordered to destroy them.

We are not told of any offence that the Gibeonites had committed; and perhaps covetousness lay at the root of Saul's policy. There is reason to believe that

when he saw his popularity declining and David's advancing, he had recourse to unscrupulous methods of increasing his own. Addressing his servants, before the slaughter of Abimelech and the priests, he asked, "Hear now, ye Benjamites; will the son of Jesse give you fields and vineyards, that all of you have conspired against me?" Evidently he had rewarded his favourites, especially those of his own tribe, with fields and vineyards. But how had he got these to bestow? Very probably by dispossessing the Gibeonites. Their cities, as we have seen, were in the tribe of Benjamin. But to prevent jealousy, others, both of Judah and of Israel, would get a share of the spoil. For he is said to have sought to slay the Gibeonites "in his zeal for the children of Israel and Judah." If this was the way in which the slaughter of the Gibeonites was compassed, it was fair that the nation should suffer for it. If the nation profited by the unholy transaction, and was thus induced to wink at the violation of the national faith and the massacre of an inoffensive people, it shared in Saul's guilt, and became liable to chastisement. Even David himself was not free from blame. When he came to the throne he should have seen justice done to this injured people. But probably he was afraid. He felt his own authority not very secure, and probably he shrank from raising up enemies in those whom justice would have required him to dispossess. Prince and people therefore were both at fault, and both were suffering for the wrongdoing of the nation. Perhaps Solomon had this case in view when he wrote: "Rob not the poor because he is poor, neither oppress the afflicted in the gate; for the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them."

But whatever may have been Saul's motive, it is certain that by his attempt to massacre and banish the Gibeonites a great national sin was committed, and that for this sin the nation had never humbled itself, and never made reparation.

3. What, then, was now to be done? The king left it to the Gibeonites themselves to prescribe the satisfaction which they claimed for this wrong. This was in accordance with the spirit of the law that gave a murdered man's nearest of kin a right to exact justice of the murderer. In their answer the Gibeonites disclaimed all desire for compensation in money; and very probably this was a surprise to the people. To surrender lands might have been much harder than to give up lives. What the Gibeonites asked had a grim look of justice; it showed a burning desire to bring home the punishment as near as possible to the offender: "The man that consumed us, and that devised against us that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel, let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the Lord in Gibeah of Saul, whom the Lord did choose." Seven was a perfect number, and therefore the victims should be seven. Their punishment was, to be hanged or crucified, but in inflicting this punishment the Jews were more merciful than the Romans; the criminals were first put to death, then their dead bodies were exposed to open shame. They were to be hanged "unto the Lord," as a satisfaction to expiate His just displeasure. They were to be hanged "in Gibeah of Saul," to bring home the offence visibly to him, so that the expiation should be at the same place as the crime. And when mention is made of Saul, the

Gibeonites add, "Whom the Lord did choose." For Jehovah was intimately connected with Saul's call to the throne; He was in some sense publicly identified with him; and unless something were done to disconnect Him with this crime, the reproach of it would, in measure, rest upon Him.

Such was the demand of the Gibeonites; and David deemed it right to comply with it, stipulating only that the descendants of Jonathan should not be surrendered. The sons or descendants of Saul that were given up for this execution were the two sons of Rizpah, Saul's concubine, and along with them five sons of Michal, or, as it is in the margin, of Merab, the elder daughter of Saul, whom she bare (R. V.—not "brought up," A. V.) to Adriel the Meholathite. These seven men were put to death accordingly, and their bodies exposed in the hill near Gibeah.

The transaction has a very hard look to us, though it had nothing of the kind to the people of those days. Why should these unfortunate men be punished so terribly for the sin of their father? How was it possible for David, in cold blood, to give them up to an ignominious death? How could he steel his heart against the supplications of their friends? With regard to this latter aspect of the case, it is ridiculous to cast reproach on David. As we have remarked again and again, if he had acted like other Eastern kings, he would have consigned every son of Saul to destruction when he came to the throne, and left not one remaining, for no other offence than being the children of their father. On the score of clemency to Saul's family the character of David is abundantly vindicated.

The question of justice remains. Is it not a law of

nature, it may be asked, and a law of the Bible too, that the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, but that the soul that sinneth it shall die? It is undoubtedly the rule both of nature and the Bible that the son is not to be substituted *for* the father when the father is there to bear the penalty. But it is neither the rule of the one nor of the other that the son is never to suffer *with* the father for the sins which the father has committed. On the contrary, it is what we see taking place, in many forms, every day. It is an arrangement of Providence that almost baffles the philanthropist, who sees that children often inherit from their parents a physical frame disposing them to their parents' vices, and who sees, moreover, that, when brought up by vicious parents, children are deprived of their natural rights, and are initiated into a life of vice. But the law that identified children and parents in Old Testament times was carried out to consequences which would not be tolerated now. Not only were children often punished because of their physical connection with their fathers, but they were regarded as judicially one with them, and so liable to share in their punishment. The Old Testament (as Canon Mozley has so powerfully shown *) was in some respects an imperfect economy; the rights of the individual were not so clearly acknowledged as they are under the New; the family was a sort of moral unit, and the father was the responsible agent for the whole. When Achan sinned, his whole household shared his punishment. The solidarity of the family was such that all were involved in the sin of the father. However strange it may seem to us, it did not appear at all strange in David's time

* Lectures on the Old Testament. Lecture V.: "Visitation of Sins of Fathers on Children."

that this rule should be applied in the case of Saul. On the contrary, it would probably be thought that it showed considerable moderation of feeling not to demand the death of the whole living posterity of Saul, but to limit the demand to the number of seven. Doubtless the Gibeonites had suffered to an enormous extent. Thousands upon thousands of them had probably been slain. People might be sorry for the seven young men that had to die, but that there was anything essentially unjust or even harsh in the transaction is a view of the case that would occur to no one. Justice is often hard; executions are always grim; but here was a nation that had already experienced three years of famine for the sin of Saul, and that would experience yet far more if no public expiation should take place; and seven men were not very many to die for a nation.

The grimness of the mode of punishment was softened by an incident of great moral beauty, which cannot but touch the heart of every man of sensibility. Rizpah, the concubine of Saul, and mother of two of the victims, combining the tenderness of a mother and the courage of a hero, took her position beside the gibbet; and, undeterred by the sight of the rotting bodies and the stench of the air, she suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day nor the beasts of the field by night. The poor woman must have looked for a very different destiny when she became the concubine of Saul. No doubt she expected to share in the glory of his royal state. But her lord perished in battle, and the splendour of royalty passed for ever from him and his house. Then came the famine; its cause was declared from heaven, its cure was announced by the Gibeonites. Her two sons were

among the slain. Probably they were but lads, not yet beyond the age which rouses a mother's sensibilities to the full. (This consideration likewise points to an early date.) We cannot attempt to picture her feelings. The last consolation that remained for her was to guard their remains from the vulture and the tiger. Unburied corpses were counted to be disgraced, and this, in some degree, because they were liable to be devoured by birds and beasts of prey. Rizpah could not prevent the exposure, but she could try to prevent the wild animals from devouriug them. The courage and self-denial needed for this work were great, for the risk of violence from wild beasts was very serious. All honour to this woman and her noble heart! David appears to have been deeply impressed by her heroism. When he heard of it he went and collected the bones of Jonathan and his sons, which had been buried under a tree at Jabesh-gilead, and likewise the bones of the men that had been hanged; and he buried the bones of Saul and Jonathan in Zelah, in the sepulchre of Kish, Saul's father. And after that God was entreated for the land.

We offer a concluding remark, founded on the tone of this narrative. It is marked, as every one must perceive, by a subdued, solemn tone. Whatever may be the opinion of our time as to the need of apologizing for it, it is evident that no apology was deemed necessary for the transaction at the time this record was written. The feeling of all parties evidently was, that it was indispensable that things should take the course they did. No one expressed wonder when the famine was accounted for by the crime of Saul. No one objected when the question of expiation was referred to the Gibeonites. The house of Saul made no protest

when seven of his sons were demanded for death. The men themselves, when they knew what was coming, seem to have been restrained from attempting to save themselves by flight. It seemed as if God were speaking, and the part of man was simply to obey. When unbelievers object to passages in the Bible like this, or like the sacrifice of Isaac, or the death of Achan, they are accustomed to say that they exemplify the worst passions of the human heart consecrated under the name of religion. We affirm that in this chapter there is no sign of any outburst of passion whatever; everything is done with gravity, with composure and solemnity. And, what is more, the graceful piety of Rizpah is recorded, with simplicity, indeed, but in a tone that indicates appreciation of her tender motherly soul. Savages thirsting for blood are not in the habit of appreciating such touching marks of affection. And further, we are made to feel that it was a pleasure to David to pay that mark of respect for Rizpah's feelings in having the men buried. He did not desire to lacerate the feelings of the unhappy mother; he was glad to soothe them as far as he could. To him, as to his Lord, judgment was a strange work, but he delighted in mercy. And he was glad to be able to mingle a slight streak of mercy with the dark colours of a picture of God's judgment on sin.

To all right minds it is painful to punish, and when punishment has to be inflicted it is felt that it ought to be done with great solemnity and gravity, and with an entire absence of passion and excitement. In a sinful world God too must inflict punishment. And the future punishment of the wicked is the darkest thing in all the scheme of God's government. But it must

take place. And when it does take place it will be done deliberately, solemnly, sadly. There will be no exasperation, no excitement. There will be no disregard of the feelings of the unhappy victims of the Divine retribution. What they are able to bear will be well considered. What condition they shall be placed in when the punishment comes, will be calmly weighed. But may we not see what a distressing thing it will be (if we may use such an expression with reference to God) to consign His creatures to punishment? How different His feelings when He welcomes them to eternal glory! How different the feelings of His angels when that change takes place by which punishment ceases to hang over men, and glory takes its place! "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Is it not blessed to think that this is the feeling of God, and of all Godlike spirits? Will you not all believe this,—believe in the mercy of God, and accept the provision of His grace? "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but should have eternal life."

CHAPTER XXIX.

LAST BATTLES AND THE MIGHTY MEN.

2 SAMUEL xxi. 15—22; xxiii. 8—39.

IN entering on the consideration of these two portions of the history of David, we must first observe that the events recorded do not appear to belong to the concluding portion of his reign. It is impossible for us to assign a precise date to them, or at least to most of them, but the displays of physical activity and courage which they record would lead us to ascribe them to a much earlier period. Originally, they seem to have formed parts of a record of David's wars, and to have been transferred to the Books of Samuel and Chronicles in order to give a measure of completeness to the narrative. The narrative in Chronicles is substantially the same as that in Samuel, but the text is purer. From notes of time in Chronicles it is seen that some at least of the encounters took place after the war with the children of Ammon.

Why have these passages been inserted in the history of the reign of David? Apparently for two chief purposes. In the first place, to give us some idea of the dangers to which he was exposed in his military life, dangers manifold and sometimes overwhelming, and all but fatal; and thus enable us to see how wonderful were the deliverances he experienced,

and prepare us for entering into the song of thanksgiving which forms the twenty-second chapter, and of which these deliverances form the burden. In the second place, to enable us to understand the human instrumentality by which he achieved so brilliant a success, the kind of men by whom he was helped, the kind of spirit by which they were animated, and their intense personal devotion to David himself. The former purpose is that which is chiefly in view in the end of the twenty-first chapter, the latter in the twenty-third. The exploits themselves occur in encounters with the Philistines, and may therefore be referred partly to the time after the slaughter of Goliath, when he first distinguished himself in warfare, and the daughters of Israel began to sing, "Saul hath slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands;" partly to the time in his early reign when he was engaged driving them out of Israel, and putting a bridle on them to restrain their inroads; and partly to a still later period. It is to be observed that nothing more is sought than to give a sample of David's military adventures, and for this purpose his wars with the Philistines alone are examined. If the like method had been taken with all his other campaigns,—against Edom, Moab, and Ammon; against the Syrians of Rehob, and Maacah, and Damascus, and the Syrians beyond the river,—we might borrow the language of the Evangelist, and say that the world itself would not have been able to contain the books that should be written.

Four exploits are recorded in the closing verses of the twenty-first chapter, all with "sons of the giant," or, as it is in the margin, of Rapha. The first was with a man who is called Ishbi-benob, but there is reason to

suspect that the text is corrupt here, and in Chronicles this incident is not mentioned. The language applied to David, "David and his servants went down," would lead us to believe that the incident happened at an early period, when the Philistines were very powerful in Israel, and it was a mark of great courage to "go down" to their plains, and attack them in their own country. To do this implied a long journey, over steep and rough roads, and it is no wonder if between the journey and the fighting David "waxed faint." Then it was that the son of the giant, whose spear or spear-head weighed three hundred shekels of brass, or about eight pounds, fell upon him "with a new sword, and thought to have slain him." There is no noun in the original for sword; all that is said is, that the giant fell on David with something new, and our translators have made it a sword. The Revised Version in the margin gives "new armour." The point is evidently this, that the newness of the thing made it more formidable. This could hardly be said of a common sword, which would be really more formidable after it had ceased to be quite new, since, by having used it, the owner would know it better and wield it more perfectly. It seems better to take the marginal reading "new armour," that is, new defensive armour, against which the weary David would direct his blows in vain. Evidently he was in the utmost peril of his life, but was rescued by his nephew Abishai, who killed the giant. The risk to which he was exposed was such that his people vowed they would not let him go out with them to battle any more, lest the light of Israel should be quenched.

During the rest of that campaign the vow seems to have been respected, for the other three giants were

not slain by David personally, but by others. As to other campaigns, David usually took his old place as leader of the army, until the battle against Absalom, when his people prevailed on him to remain in the city.

Three of the four duels recorded here took place at Gob,—a place not now known, but most probably in the neighbourhood of Gath. In fact, all the encounters probably took place near that city. One of the giants slain is said in Samuel, by a manifest error, to have been Goliath the Gittite; but the error is corrected in Chronicles, where he is called the brother of Goliath. The very same expression is used of his spear as in the case of Goliath: "the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam." Of the fourth giant it is said that he defied Israel, as Goliath had done. Of the whole four it is said that "they were born to the giant in Gath." This does not necessarily imply that they were all sons of the same father, "the giant" being used generically to denote the race rather than the individual.

But the tenor of the narrative and many of its expressions carry us back to the early days of David. There seems to have been a nest at Gath of men of gigantic stature, brothers or near relations of Goliath. Against these he was sent, perhaps in one of the expeditions when Saul secretly desired that he should fall by the hand of the Philistines. If it was in this way that he came to encounter the first of the four, Saul had calculated well, and was very nearly carrying his point. But though man proposes, God disposes. The example of David in his encounter with Goliath, even at this early period, had inspired several young men of the Hebrews, and even when David was interdicted from going himself into battle, others were

raised up to take his place. Every one of the giants found a match either in David or among his men. It was indeed highly perilous work; but David was encompassed by a Divine Protector, and being destined for high service in the kingdom of God, he was "immortal till his work was done."

We have said that these were but samples of David's trials, and that they were probably repeated again and again in the course of the many wars in which he was enggaed. One can see that the danger was often very imminent, making him feel that his only possible deliverance must come from God. Such dangers, therefore, were wonderfully fitted to exercise and discipline the spirit of trust. Not once or twice, but hundreds of times, in his early experience he would find himself constrained to cry to the Lord. And protected as he was, delivered as he was, the conviction would become stronger and stronger that God cared for him and would deliver him to the end. We see from all this how unnecessary it is to ascribe all the psalms where David is pressed by enemies either to the time of Saul or to the time of Absalom. There were hundreds of other times in his life when he had the same experience, when he was reduced to similar straits, and his appeal lay to the God of his life.

And this was in truth the healthiest period of his spiritual life. It was amid these perilous but bracing experiences that his soul prospered most. The north wind of danger and difficulty braced him to spiritual self-denial and endurance; the south wind of prosperity and luxurious enjoyment was what nearly destroyed him. Let us not become impatient when anxieties multiply around us, and we are beset by troubles, and labours, and difficulties. Do not be tempted

to contrast your miserable lot with that of others, who have health while you are sick, riches while you are poor, honour while you are despised, ease and enjoyment while you have care and sorrow. By all these things God desires to draw you to Himself, to discipline your soul, to lead you away from the broken cisterns that can hold no water to the fountain of living waters. Guard earnestly against the unbelief that at such times would make your hands hang down and your heart despond; rally your sinking spirit. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me?" Remember the promise, "I will never leave you nor forsake you;" and one day you shall have cause to look back on this as the most useful, the most profitable, the most healthful, period of your spiritual life.

We pass to the twenty-third chapter, which tells us of David's mighty men. The narrative, at some points, is not very clear; but we gather from it that David had an order of thirty men distinguished for their valour; that besides these there were three of supereminent merit, and another three, who were also eminent, but who did not attain to the distinction of the first three. Of the first three, the first was Jashobeam the Hachmonite (see 1 Chron. xi. 11), the second Eleazar, and the third Shammah. Of the second three, who were not quite equal to the first, only two are mentioned, Abishai and Benaiah; thereafter we have the names of the thirty. It is remarkable that Joab's name does not occur in the list, but as he was captain of the host, he probably held a higher position than any. Certainly Joab was not wanting in valour, and must have held the highest rank in a legion of honour.

Of the three mighties of the first rank, and the two

of the second, characteristic exploits of remarkable courage and success are recorded. The first of the first rank, whom the Chronicles call Jashobeam, lifted up his spear against three hundred slain at one time. (In Samuel the number is eight hundred.) The exploit was worthy to be ranked with the famous achievement of Jonathan and his armour-bearer at the pass of Michmash. The second, Eleazar, defied the Philistines when they were gathered to battle, and when the men of Israel had gone away he smote the Philistines till his hand was weary. The third, Shammah, kept the Philistines at bay on a piece of ground covered with lentils, after the people had fled, and slew the Philistines, gaining a great victory.

Next we have a description of the exploit of three of the mighty men when the Philistines were in possession of Bethlehem, and David in a hold near the cave of Adullam (see 2 Sam. v. 15-21). The occasion of their exploit was an interesting one. Contemplating the situation, and grieved to think that his native town should be in the enemy's hands, David gave expression to a wish—"Oh that some one would give me water to drink of the well of Bethlehem which is before the gate!" It was probably meant for little more than the expression of an earnest wish that the enemy were dislodged from their position—that there were no obstruction between him and the well, that access to it were as free as in the days of his youth. But the three mighty men took him at his word, and breaking through the host of the Philistines, brought the water to David. It was a singular proof of his great personal influence; he was so loved and honoured that to gratify his wish these three men took their lives in their hands to obtain the water. Water got at such a

cost was sacred in his eyes; it was a thing too holy for man to turn to his use, so he poured it out before the Lord.

Next we have a statement bearing on two of the second three. Abishai, David's nephew, who was one of them, lifted up his spear against three hundred and slew them. Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, slew two lion-like men of Moab (the two sons of Ariel of Moab, R.V.); also, in time of snow, he slew a lion in a pit; and finally he slew an Egyptian, a powerful man, attacking him when he had only a staff in his hand, wrenching his spear from him, and killing him with his own spear. The third of this trio has not been mentioned; some conjecture that he was Amasa ("chief of the captains" —"the thirty," R.V., 1 Chron. xii. 18), and that his name was not recorded because he deserted David to side with Absalom. Among the other thirty, we cannot but be struck with two names—Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite, and apparently the father of Bathsheba; and Uriah the Hittite. The sin of David was all the greater if it involved the dishonour of men who had served him so bravely as to be enrolled in his legion of honour.

With regard to the kind of exploits ascribed to some of these men, a remark is necessary. There is an appearance of exaggeration in statements that ascribe to a single warrior the routing and killing of hundreds through his single sword or spear. In the eyes of some such statements give the narrative an unreliable look, as if the object of the writer had been more to give *éclat* to the warriors than to record the simple truth. But this impression arises from our tendency to ascribe the conditions of modern warfare to the warfare of these times. In Eastern history, cases of a single warrior

putting a large number to flight, and even killing them, are not uncommon. For though the strength of the whole number was far more than a match for his, the strength of each individual was far inferior; and if the mass of them were scarcely armed, and the few who had arms were far inferior to him, the result would be that after some had fallen the rest would take to flight; and the destruction of life in a retreat was always enormous. The incident recorded of Eleazar is very graphic and truth-like. "He smote the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clave unto his sword." A Highland sergeant at Waterloo had done such execution with his basket-handled sword, and so much blood had coagulated round his hand, that it had to be released by a blacksmith, so firmly were they glued together. The style of Eastern warfare was highly favourable to deeds of great courage being done by individuals, and in the terrific panic which followed their first successes prodigious slaughter often ensued. Under present conditions of fighting such things cannot be done.

The glimpse which these little notices give us of King David and his knights is extremely interesting. The story of Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table bears a resemblance to it. We see the remarkable personal influence of David, drawing to himself so many men of spirit and energy, firing them by his own example, securing their warm personal attachment, and engaging them in enterprises equal to his own. How far they shared his devotional spirit we have no means of judging. If the historian reflects the general sentiment in recording their victories when he says, once and again, "The Lord wrought a great victory that day" (xxiii. 10, 12), we should say that trust in God

must have been the general sentiment. "If it had not been the Lord that was on our side, . . . they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us." It is no wonder that David soon gained a great military renown. Such a king, surrounded by such a class of lieutenants, might well spread alarm among all his enemies. One who, besides having such a body of helpers, could claim the assistance of the Lord of hosts, and could enter battle with the shout, "Let God arise; and let His enemies be scattered; and let them also that hate Him flee before Him," might well look for universal victory. Trustworthy generals, we are told, double the value of the troops; and the soldiers that were led by such leaders, trusting in the Lord of hosts, could hardly fail of triumph.

And thus, too, we may see how David came to be thoroughly under the influence of the military spirit, and of some of the less favourable features of that spirit. Accustomed to such scenes of bloodshed, he would come to think lightly of the lives of his enemies. A hostile army he would be prone to regard as a kind of infernal machine, an instrument of evil only, and therefore to be destroyed. Hence the complacency he expresses in the destruction of his enemies. Hence the judgment he calls down on those who thwarted and opposed him. If, in the songs of David, this feeling sometimes disappears, and the expressed desire of his heart is that the nations may be glad and sing for joy, that the people may praise God, that all the people may praise Him, this seems to be in the later period of his life, when all his enemies had been subdued, and he had rest on every side. Even in earnest and spiritually-minded men, religion is often coloured by their worldly calling; and in no case more so, sometimes for better

and sometimes for worse, than in those who follow the profession of arms.

But in all this military career and influence of David, may we not trace a type of character which was realised in a far higher sphere, and to far grander purpose, in the career of Jesus, David's Son? David on an earthly level is Jesus on a higher. Every noble quality of David, his courage, his activity, his affection, his obedience and trust toward God, his devotion to the welfare of others, reappears purer and higher in Jesus. If David is surrounded by his thirty mighties and his two threes, so is Jesus by His twelve apostles, His seventy disciples, and pre-eminently the three apostles who went with Him into the innermost scenes. If David's men are roused by his example to deeds of daring like his own, so the apostles and disciples go into the world to teach, to fight, to heal, and to bless, as Christ had done before them. Looking back from the present moment to David's time, what young man of spirit but feels that it would have been a great joy to belong to his company, much better than to be among those who were always carping and criticising, and laughing at the men who shared his danger and sacrifices? And does any one think that, when another cycle of ages has gone past, he will have occasion to congratulate himself that while he lived on earth he had nothing to do with Christ and earnest Christians, that he bore no part in any Christian battle, that he kept well away from Christ and His staff, that he preferred the service and pleasure of the world? Surely no. Shall any of us, then, deliberately do to-day what we know we shall repent to-morrow? Is it not certain that Jesus Christ is an unrivalled Commander, pure and noble above all His fellows, that His life was the most

glorious ever led on earth, and that His service is by far the most honourable? We do not dwell at this moment on the great fact that only in His faith and fellowship can any of us escape the wrath to come, or gain the favour of God. We ask you to say in what company you can spend your lives to most profit, under whose influence you may receive the highest impulses, and be made to do the best service for God and man? It must have been interesting in David's time to see his people "willing in the day of his power," to see young men flocking to his standard in the beauties of holiness, like dewdrops from the womb of the morning. And still more glorious is the sight when young men, even the highest born and the highest gifted, having had grace to see who and what Jesus Christ is, find no manner of life worthy to be compared in essential dignity and usefulness with His service, and, in spite of the world, give themselves to Him. Oh that we could see many such rallying to His standard, contrasting, as St. Paul did, the two services, and counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord!

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SONG OF THANKSGIVING.

2 SAMUEL xxii.

SOME of David's actions are very characteristic of himself; there are other actions quite out of harmony with his character. This psalm of thanksgiving belongs to the former order. It is quite like David, at the conclusion of his military enterprises, to cast his eye gratefully over the whole, and acknowledge the goodness and mercy that had followed him all along. Unlike many, he was as careful to thank God for mercies past and present as to entreat Him for mercies to come. The whole Book of Psalms resounds with halleluiahs, especially the closing part. In the song before us we have something like a grand halleluiah, in which thanks are given for all the deliverances and mercies of the past, and unbounded confidence expressed in God's mercy and goodness for the time to come.

The date of this song is not to be determined by the place which it occupies in the history. We have already seen that the last few chapters of Samuel consist of supplementary narratives, not introduced at their regular places, but needful to give completeness to the history. It is likely that this psalm was written considerably before the end of David's reign. Two con-

siderations make it all but certain that its date is earlier than Absalom's rebellion. In the first place, the mention of the name of Saul in the first verse—"in the day when God delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies and out of the hand of Saul"—would seem to imply that the deliverance from Saul was somewhat recent, certainly not so remote as it would have been at the end of David's reign. And secondly, while the affirmation of David's sincerity and honesty in serving God might doubtless have been made at any period of his life, yet some of his expressions would not have been likely to be used after his deplorable fall. It is not likely that after that, he would have spoken, for example, of the cleanness of his hands, stained as they had been by wickedness that could hardly have been surpassed. On the whole, it seems most likely that the psalm was written about the time referred to in 2 Sam. vii. 1—"when the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies round about." This was the time when it was in his heart to build the temple, and we know from that and other circumstances that he was then in a state of overflowing thankfulness.

Besides the introduction, the song consists of three leading parts not very definitely separated from each other, but sufficiently marked to form a convenient division, as follows:—

I. Introduction: the leading thought of the song, an adoring acknowledgment of what God had been and was to David (vv. 2-4).

II. A narrative of the Divine interpositions on his behalf, embracing his dangers, his prayers, and the Divine deliverances in reply (vv. 5-19).

III. The grounds of his protection and success (vv. 20-30).

IV. References to particular acts of God's goodness in various parts of his life, interspersed with reflections on the Divine character, from all which the assurance is drawn that that goodness would be continued to him and his successors, and would secure through coming ages the welfare and extension of the kingdom. And here we observe what is so common in the Psalms: a gradual rising above the idea of a mere earthly kingdom; the type passes into the antitype; the kingdom of David melts, as in a dissolving view, into the kingdom of the Messiah; thus a more elevated tone is given to the song, and the assurance is conveyed to every believer that as God protected David and his kingdom, so shall He protect and glorify the kingdom of His Son for ever.

I. In the burst of adoring gratitude with which the psalm opens as its leading thought, we mark David's recognition of Jehovah as the source of all the protection, deliverance, and success he had ever enjoyed, along with a special assertion of closest relationship to Him, in the frequent use of the word "my," and a very ardent acknowledgment of the claim to his gratitude thus arising—"God, who is worthy to be praised."

The feeling that recognised God as the Author of all his deliverances was intensely strong, for every expression that can denote it is heaped together: "My rock, my portion, my deliverer; the God of my rock, my shield; the horn of my salvation, my high tower, my refuge, my Saviour." He takes no credit to himself; he gives no glory to his captains; the glory is all the Lord's. He sees God so supremely the Author of his deliverance that the human instruments that helped him are for the moment quite out of view.

He who, in the depths of his penitence, sees but one supremely injured Being, and says, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned," at the height of his prosperity sees but one gracious Being, and adores Him, who only is his rock and his salvation. In an age when all the stress is apt to be laid on the human instruments, and God left out of view, this habit of mind is instructive and refreshing. It was a touching incident in English history when, after the battle of Agincourt, Henry V. of England directed the hundred and fifteenth Psalm to be sung; prostrating himself on the ground, and causing his whole army to do the same, when the words were sounded out, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Thy name give glory."

The emphatic use of the pronoun "my" by the Psalmist is very instructive. It is so easy to speak in general terms of what God is, and what God does; but it is quite another thing to be able to appropriate Him as ours, and rejoice in that relation. Luther said of the twenty-third Psalm that the word "my" in the first verse was the very hinge of the whole. There is a whole world of difference between the two expressions, "The Lord is a Shepherd" and "The Lord is my Shepherd." The use of the "my" indicates a personal transaction, a covenant relation into which the parties have solemnly entered. No man is entitled to use this expression who has merely a reverential feeling towards God, and respect for His will. You must have come to God as a sinner, owning and feeling your unworthiness, and casting yourself on His grace. You must have transacted with God in the spirit of His exhortation, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and

I will be a Father unto you; and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

One other point has to be noticed in this introduction —when David comes to express his dependence on God, he very specially sets Him before his mind as "worthy to be praised." He calls to mind the gracious character of God,—not an austere God, reaping where He has not sown, and gathering where He has not strawed, but "the Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth." "This doctrine," says Luther, "is in tribulation the most ennobling and truly golden. One cannot imagine what assistance such praise of God is in pressing danger. For as soon as you begin to praise God the sense of the evil will also begin to abate, the comfort of your heart will grow; and then God will be called on with confidence. There are some who cry to the Lord and are not heard. Why is this? Because they do not praise the Lord when they cry to Him, but go to Him with reluctance; they have not represented to themselves how sweet the Lord is, but have looked only to their own bitterness. But no one gets deliverance from evil by looking simply upon his evil and becoming alarmed at it; he can get deliverance only by rising above his evil, hanging it on God, and having respect to His goodness. Oh, hard counsel, doubtless, and a rare thing truly, in the midst of trouble to conceive of God as sweet, and worthy to be praised; and when He has removed Himself from us and is incomprehensible, even then to regard Him more intensely than we regard our misfortune that keeps us from Him! Only let one try it, and make the endeavour to praise God, though in little heart for it he will soon experience an enlightenment."

II. We pass on to the part of the song where the Psalmist describes his trials and God's deliverances in his times of danger (vv. 5-20).

The description is eminently poetical. First, there is a vivid picture of his troubles. "The waves of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid; the sorrows of hell compassed me; the snares of death prevented me" ("The cords of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodliness made me afraid; the cords of sheol were round about me; the snares of death came upon me," R.V.). It is no overcharged picture. With Saul's javelins flying at his head in the palace, or his best troops scouring the wilderness in search of him; with Syrian hosts bearing down on him like the waves of the sea, and a confederacy of nations conspiring to swallow him up, he might well speak of the waves of death and the cords of Hades. He evidently desires to describe the extremest peril and distress that can be conceived, a situation where the help of man is vain indeed. Then, after a brief account of his calling upon God, comes a most animated description of God coming to his help. The description is ideal, but it gives a vivid view how the Divine energy is roused when any of God's children are in distress. It is in heaven as in an earthly home when an alarm is given that one of the little children is in danger, has wandered away into a thicket where he has lost his way: every servant is summoned, every passer-by is called to the rescue, the whole neighbourhood is roused to the most strenuous efforts; so when the cry reached heaven that David was in trouble, the earthquake and the lightning and all the other messengers of heaven were sent out to his aid; nay, these were not enough; God Himself flew, riding on a cherub, yea, He did fly upon

the wings of the wind. Faith saw God bestirring Himself for his deliverance, as if every agency of nature had been set in motion on his behalf.

And this being done, his deliverance was conspicuous and complete. He saw God's hand stretched out with remarkable distinctness. There could be no more doubt that it was God that rescued him from Saul than that it was He that snatched Israel from Pharaoh when literally "the channels of the sea appeared, the foundations of the world were discovered, at the rebuking of the Lord, at the blast of the breath of His nostrils." There could be no more doubt that it was God who protected David when men rose to swallow him up than that it was He who drew Moses from the Nile—"He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters." No miracles had been wrought on David's behalf; unlike Moses and Joshua before him, and unlike Elijah and Elisha after him, he had not had the laws of nature suspended for his protection; yet he could see the hand of God stretched out for him as clearly as if a miracle had been wrought at every turn. Does this not show that ordinary Christians, if they are but careful to watch, and humble enough to watch in a chastened spirit, may find in their history, however quietly it may have glided by, many a token of the interest and care of their Father in heaven? And what a blessed thing to have accumulated through life a store of such providences—to have Ebenezers reared along the whole line of one's history! What courage after looking over such a past might one feel in looking forward to the future!

III. The next section of the song sets forth the grounds on which the Divine protection was thus enjoyed by David. Substantially these grounds were the

uprightness and faithfulness with which he had served God. The expressions are strong, and at first sight they have a flavour of self-righteousness. "The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath He recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord, and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all His judgments were before me, and I put not away His statutes from me. I was also perfect with Him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity." But it is impossible to read this Psalm without feeling that it is not pervaded by the spirit of the self-righteous man. It is pervaded by a profound sense of dependence on God, and of obligation to His mercy and love. Now that is the very opposite of the self-righteous spirit. We may surely find another way of accounting for such expressions used by David here. We may surely believe that all that was meant by him was to express the unswerving sincerity and earnestness with which he had endeavoured to serve God, with which he had resisted every temptation to conscious unfaithfulness, with which he had resisted every allurement to idolatry on the one hand or to the neglect of the welfare of God's nation on the other. What he here celebrates is, not any personal righteousness that might enable him as an individual to claim the favour and reward of God, but the ground on which he, as the public champion of God's cause before the world, enjoyed God's countenance and obtained His protection. There would be no self-righteousness in an inferior officer of the navy or the army who had been sent on some expedition saying, "I obeyed your instructions in every particular; I never deviated from the course you prescribed." There would have been no self-righteousness in such a man as Luther

saying, "I constantly maintained the principles of the Bible; I never once abandoned Protestant ground." Such affirmations would never be held to imply a claim of personal sinlessness during the whole course of their lives. Substantially all that is asserted is, that in their public capacity they proved faithful to the cause entrusted to them; they never consciously betrayed their public charge. Now it is this precisely that David affirms of himself. Unlike Saul, who abandoned the law of the kingdom, David uniformly endeavoured to carry it into effect. The success which followed he does not claim as any credit to himself, but as due to his having followed the instructions of his heavenly Lord. It is the very opposite of a self-righteous spirit. He would have us understand that if ever he had abandoned the guidance of God, if ever he had relied on his own wisdom and followed the counsels of his own heart, everything would have gone wrong with him; the fact that he had been successful was due altogether to the Divine wisdom that guided and the Divine strength that upheld him.

Even with this explanation, some of the expressions may seem too strong. How could he speak of the cleanness of his hands, and of his not having wickedly departed from his God? Granting that the song was written before his sin in the case of Uriah, yet remembering how he had lied at Nob and equivocated at Gath, might he not have used less sweeping words? But it is not the way of burning, enthusiastic minds to be for ever weighing their words, and guarding against misunderstandings. Enthusiasm sweeps along in a rapid current. And David correctly describes the prevailing features of his public endeavours. His public life was unquestionably marked by a sincere and commonly

successful endeavour to follow the will of God. In contrast with Saul and Ishbosheth, side by side with Absalom or Sheba, his career was purity itself, and bore out the rule of the Divine government, "With the merciful Thou wilt show Thyself merciful, and with the upright man Thou wilt show Thyself upright. With the pure Thou wilt show Thyself pure, and with the froward Thou wilt show Thyself unsavoury." If God is to prosper us, there must be an inner harmony between us and Him. If the habit of our life be opposed to God, the result can only be collision and rebuke. David was conscious of the inner harmony, and therefore he was able to rely on being supported and blessed.

IV. In the wide survey of his life and of his providential mercies, the eye of the Psalmist is particularly fixed on some of his deliverances, in the remembrance of which he specially praises God. One of the earliest appears to be recalled in the words, "By my God have I leaped over a wall,"—the wall, it may be supposed, of Gibeah, down which Michal let him when Saul sent to take him in his house. Still further back, perhaps, in his life is the allusion in another expression —"Thy gentleness hath made me great." He seems to go back to his shepherd life, and in the gentleness with which he dealt with the feeble lamb that might have perished in rougher hands to find an emblem of God's method with himself. If God had not dealt gently with him, he never would have become what he was. The Divine gentleness had made paths easy that rougher treatment would have made intolerable. And who of us that looks back but must own our obligations to the gentleness of God, the tender, forbearing, nay loving, treatment He has bestowed on us, even in the

midst of provocations that would have justified far harsher treatment?

But what? Can David praise God's gentleness and in the next words utter such terrible words against his foes? How can he extol God's gentleness to him and immediately dwell on his tremendous severity to them? "I have consumed them and wounded them that they could not arise; yea, they are fallen under my feet. . . . Then did I beat them as small as the dust of the earth, I did stamp them as the mire of the street, and did spread them abroad." It is the military spirit which we have so often observed, looking on his enemies in one light only, as identified with everything evil and enemies of all that was good. To show mercy to them would be like showing mercy to destructive wild beasts, raging bears, venomous serpents, and rapacious vultures. Mercy to them would be cruelty to all God's servants; it would be ruin to God's cause. No! for them the only fit doom was destruction, and that destruction he had dealt to them with no unsparing hand.

But while we perceive his spirit, and harmonise it with his general character, we cannot but regard it as the spirit of one who was imperfectly enlightened. We tremble when we think what fearful wickedness persecutors and inquisitors have committed, under the idea that the same course was to be followed against those whom they deemed enemies of the cause of God. We rejoice in the Christian spirit that teaches us to regard even public enemies as our brothers, for whom individually kindly and brotherly feelings are to be cherished. And we remember the new aspect in which our relations to such have been placed by our Lord: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them

that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you."

In the closing verses of the Psalm, the views of the Psalmist seem to sweep beyond the limits of an earthly kingdom. His eye seems to embrace the wide-spreading dominion of Messiah; at all events, he dwells on those features of his own kingdom that were typical of the all-embracing kingdom of the Gospel: "Thou hast made me the head of the nations; a people whom I have not known shall serve me. As soon as they hear of me they shall obey me; the strangers shall submit themselves unto me." The forty-ninth verse is quoted by St. Paul (Rom. xv. 9) as a proof that in the purpose of God the salvation of Christ was designed for Gentiles as well as Jews. "It is beyond doubt," says Luther, "that the wars and victories of David prefigured the passion and resurrection of Christ." At the same time, he admits that it is very doubtful how far the Psalm applies to Christ, and how far to David, and he declines to press the type to particulars. But we may surely apply the concluding words to David's Son: "He showeth loving-kindness to his anointed, to David and to his seed for evermore."

It is interesting to mark the military aspect of the kingdom gliding into the missionary. Other psalms bring out more clearly this missionary element, exhibit David rejoicing in the widening limits of his kingdom, in the wider diffusion of the knowledge of the true God, and in the greater happiness and prosperity accruing to men. And yet, perhaps, his views on the subject were comparatively dim; he may have been disposed to identify the conquests of the sword and the conquests of the truth instead of regarding the one as but typical of the other. The visions and revelations of his later

years seem to have thrown new light on this glorious subject, and though not immediately, yet ultimately, to have convinced him that truth, righteousness, and meekness were to be the conquering weapons of Messiah's reign.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE LAST WORDS OF DAVID.

2 Samuel xxiii. 1—7. (*See Revised Version and margin.*)

OF these "the last words of David," we need not understand that they were the last words he ever spoke, but his last song or psalm, his latest vision, and therefore the subject that was most in his mind in the last period of his life. The Psalm recorded in the preceding chapter was an earlier song, and its main drift was of the past. Of this latest Psalm the main drift is of the future. The colours of this vision are brighter than those of any other. Aged though the seer was, there is a glory in this his latest vision unsurpassed in any that went before. The setting sun spreads a lustre around as he sinks under the horizon unequalled by any he diffused even when he rode in the height of the heavens.

The song falls into four parts. First, there is an elaborate introduction, descriptive of the singer and the inspiration which gave birth to his song; secondly, the main subject of the prophecy, a Ruler among men, of wonderful brightness and glory; thirdly, a reference to the Psalmist's own house and the covenant God had made with him; and finally, in the way of contrast to the preceding, a prediction of the doom of the ungodly.

I. In the introduction, we cannot but be struck with

the formality and solemnity of the affirmation respecting the singer and the inspiration under which he sang.

> "David, the son of Jesse, saith,
> And the man who was raised on high saith,
> The anointed of the God of Jacob,
> And the sweet psalmist of Israel:
> The Spirit of the Lord spake by me,
> And His word was upon my tongue;
> The God of Israel said,
> The Rock of Israel spake to me" (R.V.).

The first four clauses represent David as the speaker, the second four represent God's Spirit as inspiring his words. The introduction to Balaam's prophecies is the only passage where we find a similar structure, nor is this the only point of resemblance between the two songs.

> "Balaam, the son of Beor, saith,
> And the man whose eye was closed saith;
> He saith which heareth the words of God,
> And knoweth the knowledge of the Most High;
> Which seeth the vision of the Almighty,
> Falling down, and having his eyes open"
> (Num. xxiv. 15, 16, R.V.).

In both prophecies, the word translated "saith" is peculiar. While occurring between two and three hundred times in the formula "Thus saith the Lord," it is used by a human speaker only in these two places and in Prov. xxx. 1. Both Balaam and David begin by giving their own name and that of their father, thereby indicating their native insignificance, and disclaiming any right to speak on subjects so lofty through any wisdom or insight of their own. Immediately after, they claim to speak the words of God. All the grounds on which David should be listened to fall under this head. Was he not "raised up on high"? Was he not the

anointed of the God of Jacob? Was he not the sweet Psalmist of Israel? Having been raised up on high, David had established the kingdom of Israel on a firm and lasting basis, he had destroyed all its enemies, and he had established a comely order and prosperity throughout all its borders; as the sweet singer of Israel, or, as it has been otherwise rendered, "the lovely one in Israel's songs of praise"—that is, the man who had been specially gifted to compose songs of praise in honour of Israel's God—it was fitting that he should be made the organ of this very remarkable and glorious communication. It is interesting to to observe how David must have been attracted by Balaam's vision. The dark wall of the Moabite mountains was a familiar object to him, and must often have recalled the strange but unworthy prophet who spoke of the Star that was to shine so gloriously, and the Sceptre that was to have such a wonderful rule. Often during his life we may believe that David devoutly desired to know something more of that mysterious Star and Sceptre; and now that desire is fulfilled; the Star is as the light of the morning star; the Sceptre is that of a blessed ruler, "one that ruleth over men righteously, that ruleth in the fear of God."

The second part of the introduction stamps the prophecy with a fourfold mark of inspiration. 1. "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me." For "the prophecy came not of old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." 2. "His word was in my tongue." For in high visions like this, of which no wisdom of man can create even a shadow, it is not enough that the Spirit should merely guide the writer; this is one of the utterances where verbal inspiration must have been enjoyed.

3. "The God of Israel said," He who entered into covenant with Israel, and promised him great and peculiar mercies. 4. "The Rock of Israel spake to me," the faithful One, whose words are stable as a rock, and who provides for Israel a foundation-stone, elect and precious, immovable as the everlasting hills.

So remarkable an introduction must be followed by no ordinary prophecy. If the prophecy should bear on nothing more remarkable than some earthly successor of David, all this preliminary glorification would be singularly out of place. It would be like a great procession of heralds and flourishing of trumpets in an earthly kingdom to announce some event of the most ordinary kind, the repeal of a tax or the appointment of an officer.

II. We come then to the great subject of the prophecy —a Ruler over men. The rendering of the Authorized Version is somewhat lame and obscure, "He that ruleth over men must be just," there being nothing whatever in the original corresponding to "must be." The Revised Version is at once more literal and more expressive :—

> "One that ruleth over men righteously,
> Ruling in the fear of God,
> He shall be as the light of the morning."

It is a vision of a remarkable Ruler, not a Ruler over the kingdom of Israel merely, but a Ruler "over men." The Ruler seen is One whose government knows no earthly limits, but prevails wherever there are men. Solomon could not be the ruler seen, for, wide though his empire was, he was king of Israel only, not king of men. It was but a speck of the habitable globe, but

a morsel of that part of it that was inhabited even then, over which Solomon reigned. If the term "One that ruleth over men" could have been appropriated by any monarch, it would have been Ahasuerus, with his hundred and twenty-seven provinces, or Alexander the Great, or some other universal monarch, that would have had the right to claim it. But every such application is out of the question. The "Ruler over men" of this vision must have been identified by David with Him "in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed."

It is worthy of very special remark that the first characteristic of this Ruler is "righteousness." There is no grander or more majestic word in the language of men. Not even love or mercy can be preferred to righteousness. And this is no casual expression, happening in David's vision, for it is common to the whole class of prophecies that predict the Messiah. "Behold, a King shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment." "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and the spirit of the fear of the Lord . . . shall rest on Him, . . . and righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins." There is no lack in the New Testament of passages to magnify the love and mercy of the Lord Jesus, yet it is made very plain that righteousness was the foundation of all His work. "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," were the words with which He removed the objections of John to His baptism, and they were words that described the business of His whole life: to fulfil all righteousness *for* His people and *in* His people—for them, to satisfy the demands of the righteous law and bear the righteous penalty of transgression; in them to infuse His own righteous spirit and mould

them into the likeness of His righteous example, to sum up the whole law of righteousness in the law of love, and by His grace instil that law into their hearts. Such essentially was the work of Christ. No man can say of the religious life that Christ expounded that it was a life of loose, feverish emotion or sentimental spirituality that left the Decalogue far out of view. Nothing could have been further from the mind of Him that said, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." Nothing could have been more unlike the spirit of Him who was not content with maintaining the letter of the Decalogue, but with His "again, I say unto you," drove its precepts so much further as into the very joints and marrow of men's souls.

It is the grand characteristic of Christ's salvation in theory that it is through righteousness; it is not less its effect in practice to promote righteousness. To any who would dream, under colour of free grace, of breaking down the law of righteousness, the words of "the Holy One and the Just" stand out as an eternal rebuke, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil."

And as Christ's work was founded on righteousness, so it was constantly done "in the fear of God,"—with the highest possible regard for His will, and reverence for His law. "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" is the first word we hear from Christ's lips; and among the last is, "Not My will, but Thine, be done." No motto could have been more appropriate for His whole life than this: "I delight to do Thy will, O My God."

Having shown the character of the Ruler, the vision next pictures the effects of His rule :—

> "He shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth,
> A morning without clouds,
> When the tender grass springeth out of the earth
> Through clear shining after rain."

But why introduce the future "shall be" in the translation when it is not in the original? May we not conceive the Psalmist reading off a vision—a scene unfolding itself in all its beauty before his mind's eye? A beautiful influence seems to come over the earth as the Divine Ruler makes His appearance, like the rising of the sun on a cloudless morning, like the appearance of the grass when the sun shines out clearly after rain. No imagery could be more delightful, or more fitly applied to Christ. The image of the morning sun presents Christ in His gladdening influences, bringing pardon to the guilty, health to the diseased, hope to the despairing; He is indeed like the morning sun, lighting up the sky with splendour and the earth with beauty, giving brightness to the languid eye, and colour to the faded cheek, and health and hope to the sorrowing heart. The chief idea under the other emblem, the grass shining clearly after rain, is that of renewed beauty and growth. The heavy rain batters the grass, as heavy trials batter the soul, but when the morning sun shines out clearly, the grass recovers, it sparkles with a fresher lustre, and grows with intenser activity. So when Christ shines on the heart after trial, a new beauty and a new growth and prosperity come to it. When this Sun of righteousness shines forth thus, in the case of individuals the understanding becomes more clear, the conscience more vigorous, the will more firm, the habits more holy, the

temper more serene, the affections more pure, the desires more heavenly. In communities, conversions are multiplied, and souls advanced steadily in holy beauties; intelligence spreads, love triumphs over selfishness, and the spirit of Christ modifies the spirit of strife and the spirit of mammon. It is with the happiest skill that Solomon, appropriating part of his father's imagery, draws the picture of the bride, with the radiance of the bridegroom falling on her: "Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?"

III. Next comes David's allusion to his own house. In our translation, and in the text of the Revised Version, this comes in to indicate a sad contrast between the bright vision just described and the Psalmist's own family. It indicates that his house or family did not correspond to the picture of the prophecy, and would not realize the emblems of the rising sun and the growing grass; but as God had made with himself an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, that satisfied him; it was all his salvation and all his desire, although his house was not to grow.

But in the margin of the Revised Version we have another translation, which reverses all this:—

> "For is not my house so with God?
> For He hath made with me an everlasting covenant,
> Ordered in all things and sure:
> For all my salvation and all my desire,
> Will He not make it to grow?"

Corresponding as this does with the translation of many scholars (*e.g.*, Boothroyd, Hengstenberg, Fairbairn), it must be regarded as admissible on the strength of outward evidence. And if so, certainly it

is very strongly recommended by internal evidence. For what reason could David have for introducing his family at all after the glorious vision if only to say that they were excluded from it? And can it be thought that David, whose nature was so intensely sympathetic, would be so pleased because he was personally provided for, though not his family? And still further, why should he go on in the next verses (6, 7) to describe the doom of the ungodly by way of contrast to what precedes if the doom of ungodly persons is the matter already introduced in the fifth verse? The passage becomes highly involved and unnatural in the light of the older translation.

The key to the passage will be found, if we mistake not, in the expression "my house." We are liable to think of this as the domestic circle, whereas it ought to be thought of as the reigning dynasty. What is denoted by the house of Hapsburg, the house of Hanover, the house of Savoy, is quite different from the personal family of any of the kings. So when David speaks of his house, he means his dynasty. In this sense his "house" had been made the subject of the most gracious promise. "Moreover, the Lord telleth thee that He will make thee an house. . . . And thine house and thy kingdom shall be made sure for ever before thee. . . . Then David said, . . . What is my house, that Thou hast brought me thus far? . . . Thou hast spoken also of Thy servant's house for a great while to come." The king felt profoundly on that occasion that his house was even more prominently the subject of Divine promise than himself. What roused his gratitude to its utmost height was the gracious provision for his house. Surely the covenant referred to in the passage now before us, "ordered in all things and sure," was

this very covenant announced to him by the prophet Nathan, the covenant that made this provision for his house. It is impossible to think of him recalling this covenant and yet saying, "Verily my house is not so with God" (R.V.).

But take the marginal reading—"Is not my house so with God?" Is not my dynasty embraced in the scope of this promise? Hath He not made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure? And will He not make this promise, which is all my salvation and all my desire, to grow, to fructify? It is infinitely more natural to represent David on this joyous occasion congratulating himself on the promise of long continuance and prosperity made to his dynasty, than dwelling on the unhappy condition of the members of his family circle.

And the facts of the future correspond to this explanation. Was not the government of David's house or dynasty in the main righteous, at least for many a reign, conducted in the fear of God, and followed by great prosperity and blessing? David himself, Solomon, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah—what other nation had ever so many Christlike kings? What a contrast was presented to this in the main by the apostate kingdom of the ten tribes, idolatrous, God-dishonouring, throughout! And as to the growth or continued vitality of his house, its "clear shining after rain," had not God promised that He would bless it, and that it would continue for ever before Him? He knew that, spiritually dormant at times, his house would survive, till a living root came from the stem of Jesse, till the Prince of life should be born from it, and once that plant of renown was raised up, there was no fear but the house would be preserved for ever. From this

point it would start on a new career of glory; nay, this was the very Ruler of whom he had been prophesying, at once David's Son and David's Lord; this was the root and the offspring of David, the bright and the morning star. Conducted to this stage in the future experience of his house, he needed no further assurance, he cherished no further desire. The covenant that rested on Him and that promised Him was ordered in all things and sure. The glorious prospect exhausted his every wish. "This is all my salvation and all my desire."

IV. The last part of the prophecy, in the way of contrast to the leading vision, is a prediction of the doom of the ungodly. The revised translation is much the clearer:—

> "But the ungodly shall be all of them as thorns to be thrust away,
> For they cannot be taken with the hand,
> But the man that toucheth them
> Must be armed with iron and the staff and spear,
> And they shall be utterly burned with fire in their place."

While some would fain think of Christ's sceptre as one of mercy only, the uniform representation of the Bible is different. In this, as in most predictions of Christ's kingly office, there is an instructive combination of mercy and judgment. In the bosom of one of Isaiah's sweetest predictions, he introduces the Messiah as anointed by the Spirit of God to proclaim "the day of vengeance of our God." In a subsequent vision, Messiah appears marching triumphantly "with dyed garments from Bozrah, after treading the people in His anger and trampling them in His fury." Malachi proclaimed Him "the Sun of righteousness, with healing under His wings," while His day was to burn as an oven and consume the proud and the

wicked like stubble. John the Baptist saw Him "with His fan in His hand, throughly purging His floor, gathering the wheat into His garner, while the chaff should be burnt with unquenchable fire." In His own words, "the Son of man shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity, and cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." And in the Apocalypse, when the King of kings and the Lord of lords is to be married to His bride, He appears "clothed with a garment dipped in blood, and out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that He should smite the nations, and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."

Nor could it be otherwise. The union of mercy and judgment is the inevitable result of the righteousness which is the foundation of His government. Sin is the abominable thing which He hates. To separate men from sin is the grand purpose of His government. For this end, He draws His people into union with Himself, thereby for ever removing their guilt, and providing for the ultimate removal of all sin from their hearts and the complete assimilation of their natures to His holy nature. Blessed are they who enter into this relation; but alas for those who, for all that He has done, prefer their sins to Him! "The ungodly shall be all of them as thorns to be thrust away."

Oh, let us not be satisfied with admiring beautiful images of Christ! Let us not deem it enough to think with pleasure of Him as the light of the morning, a morning without clouds, brightening the earth, and making it sparkle with the lustre of the sunshine on the grass after rain! Let us not satisfy ourselves with knowing that Jesus Christ came to earth on a

beneficent mission, and with thinking that surely we shall one day share in the blessed effects of His work! Nothing of that kind can avail us if we are not personally united to Christ. We must come as sinners individually to Him, cast ourselves on His free, unmerited grace, and deliberately accept His righteousness as our clothing. Then, but only then, shall we be able to sing: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE NUMBERING OF ISRAEL.

2 SAMUEL xxiv.

THOUGH David's life was now drawing to its close, neither his sins nor his chastisements were yet exhausted. One of his chief offences was committed when he was old and grey-headed. There can be little doubt that what is recorded in this chapter took place toward the close of his life, the word "again" at the beginning indicates that it was later in time than the event which gave rise to the last expression of God's displeasure to the nation. Surely there can be little ground for the doctrine of perfectionism, otherwise David, whose religion was so earnest and so deep, would have been nearer it now than this chapter shows that he was.

The offence consisted in taking a census of the people. At first it is difficult to see what there was in this that was so sinful; yet highly sinful it was in the judgment of God, in the judgment of Joab, and at last in the judgment of David too; it will be necessary, therefore, to examine the subject very carefully if we would understand clearly what constituted the great sin of David.

The origin of the proceeding was remarkable. It may be said to have had a double, or rather a triple, origin: God, David, and Satan, or, as some propose to render in place of Satan, "*an* enemy."

In Samuel we read that "the Lord's anger was again kindled against Israel." The nation required a chastisement. It needed a smart stroke of the rod to make it pause and think how it was offending God. We do not require to know very specially what it was that displeased God in a nation that had been so ready to side with Absalom and drive God's anointed from the throne. They were far from steadfast in their allegiance to God, easily drawn from the path of duty; and all that it is important for us to know is simply that at this particular time they were farther astray than usual, and more in need of chastisement. The cup of sin had filled up so far that God behoved to interpose.

For this end "the Lord moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah." The action of God in the matter, like His action in sinful matters generally, was, that He permitted it to take place. He allowed David's sinful feeling to come as a factor into His scheme with a view to the chastising of the people. We have seen many times in this history how God is represented as doing things and saying things which He does not do nor say directly, but which He takes up into His plan, with a view to the working out of some great end in the future. But in Chronicles it is said that Satan stood up against Israel and provoked David to number Israel. According to some commentators, the Hebrew word is not to be translated "Satan," because it has no article, but "an adversary," as in parallel passages: "The Lord stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite" (1 Kings xi. 14); "God stirred up another adversary to Israel, Razon, the son of Eliadib" (1 Kings xi. 23). Perhaps it was some one in the garb of a friend, but with the spirit of an enemy, that moved David in this matter. If we suppose Satan

to have been the active mover, then Bishop Hall's words will indicate the relation between the three parties: "Both God and Satan had then a hand in the work—God by permission, Satan by suggestion; God as a Judge, Satan as an enemy; God as in a just punishment for sin, Satan as in an act of sin; God in a wise ordination of it for good, Satan in a malicious intent of confusion. Thus at once God moved and Satan moved, neither is it any excuse to Satan or to David that God moved, neither is it any blemish to God that Satan moved. The ruler's sin is a punishment to a wicked people; if God were not angry with a people, He would not give up their governors to evils that provoke His vengeance; justly are we charged to make prayers and supplications as for all men, so especially for rulers."

But what constituted David's great offence in numbering the people? Every civilised State is now accustomed to number its people periodically, and for many good purposes it is a most useful step. Josephus represents that David omitted to levy the atonement money which was to be raised, according to Exod. xxx. 12, etc., from all who were numbered, but surely, if this had been his offence, it would have been easy for Joab, when he remonstrated, to remind him of it, instead of trying to dissuade him from the scheme altogether. The more common view of the transaction has been that it was objectionable, not in itself, but in the spirit by which it was dictated. That spirit seems to have been a self-glorifying spirit. It seems to have been like the spirit which led Hezekiah to show his treasures to the ambassadors of the king of Babylon. Perhaps it was designed to show, that in the number of his forces David was quite a match for the great

empires on the banks of the Nile and the Euphrates. If their fighting men could be counted by the hundred thousand or the thousand thousand, so could his. In the fighting resources of his kingdom, he was able to hold his head as high as any of them. Surely such a spirit was the very opposite of what was becoming in such a king as David. Was this not measuring the strength of a spiritual power with the measure of a carnal? Did it not leave God most sinfully out of reckoning? Nay, did it not substitute a carnal for a spiritual defence? Was it not in the very teeth of the Psalm, "There is no king saved by the multitude of an host; a mighty man is not delivered by much strength. An horse is a vain thing for safety; neither shall he deliver any by his great strength. Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine"?

That David's project was very deeply seated in his heart is evident from the fact that he was unmoved by the remonstrance of Joab. In ordinary circumstances it must have startled him to find that even he was strongly opposed to his project. It is indeed strange that Joab should have had scruples where David had none. We have been accustomed to find Joab so seldom in the right that it is hard to believe that he was in the right now. But perhaps we do Joab injustice. He was a man that could be profoundly stirred when his own interests were at stake, or his passions roused, and that seemed equally regardless of God and man in what he did on such occasions. But otherwise Joab commonly acted with prudence and moderation. He consulted for the good of the nation. He was not habitually reckless or habitually

cruel, and he seems to have had a certain amount of regard to the will of God and the theocratic constitution of the kingdom, for he was loyal to David from the very beginning, up to the contest between Solomon and Adonijah. It is evident that Joab felt strongly that in the step which he proposed to take David would be acting a part unworthy of himself and of the constitution of the kingdom, and by displeasing God would expose himself to evils far beyond any advantage he might hope to gain by ascertaining the number of the people.

For once—and this time, unhappily—David was too strong for the son of Zeruiah. The enumerators of the people were despatched, no doubt with great regularity, to take the census. The boundaries named were not beyond the territory as divided by Joshua among the Israelites, save that Tyre and Zidon were included; not that they had been annexed by David, but probably because there was an understanding that in all his military arrangements they were to be associated with him. Nine months and twenty days were occupied in the business. At the end of it, it was ascertained that the fighting men of Israel were eight hundred thousand, and those of Judah five hundred thousand; or, if we take the figures in Chronicles, eleven hundred thousand of Israel and four hundred and seventy thousand of Judah. The discrepancy is not easily accounted for; but probably in Chronicles in the number for Israel certain bodies of troops were included which were not included in Samuel, and *vice versâ* in the case of Judah.

Just as in the case of his sin in the matter of Uriah, David was long of coming to a sense of it. How his view came to change we are not told, but when the change did occur, it seems, as in the other case, to have

come with extraordinary force. "David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the Lord, I have sinned greatly in that which I have done; and now, I beseech Thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Thy servant, for I have done very foolishly." Once alive to his sin, his humiliation is very profound. His confession is frank, hearty, complete. He shows no proud desire to remain on good terms with himself, seeks nothing to break his fall or to make his humiliation less before Joab and before the people. He says, "I will confess my transgression to the Lord;" and his plea is one with which he is familiar from of old—"For Thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it is great." He is never greater than when acknowledging his sin.

Next comes the chastisement. The moment for sending it is very seasonable. It did not come while his conscience was yet slumbering, but after he had come to feel his sin. His confessions and relentings were proofs that he was now fit for chastisement; the chastisement, as in the other case, was solemnly announced by a prophet; and, as in the other case too, it fell on one of the tenderest spots of his heart. Then the first blow fell on his infant child; now it falls upon his sheep. His affections were divided between his children and his people, and in both cases the blow must have been very severe. It was, as far as we can judge, after a night of very profound humiliation that the prophet Gad was sent to him. Gad had first come to him when he was hiding from Saul, and had therefore been his friend all his kingly life. Sad that so old and so good a friend should be the bearer to the aged king of a bitter message! Seven years of famine (in 1 Chron. xxi. 12, three years), three months

of unsuccessful war, or three days of pestilence,—the choice lies between these three. All of them were well fitted to rebuke that pride in human resources which had been the occasion of his sin. Well might he say, "I am in a great strait." Oh the bitterness of the harvest when you sow to the flesh! Between these three horrors even God's anointed king has to choose. What a delusion it is that God will not be very careful in the case of the wicked to inflict the due retribution of sin! "If these things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?"

David chose the three days of pestilence. It was the shortest, no doubt, but what recommended it, especially above the three months of unsuccessful war, was that it would come more directly from the hand of God. "Let me fall now into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great, and let me not fall into the hand of man." What a frightful time it must have been! Seventy thousand died of the plague. From Dan to Beersheba nothing would be heard but a bitter cry, like that of the Egyptians when the angel slew the first-born. What days and nights of agony these must have been to David! How slowly would they drag on! What cries in the morning, "Would God it were evening!" and in the evening, "Would God it were morning!"

The pestilence, wherever it originated, seems to have advanced from every side like a besieging army, till it was ready to close upon Jerusalem. The destroying angel hovered over Mount Moriah, and, like Abraham on the same spot a thousand years before, was brandishing his sword for the work of destruction. It was a spot that had already been memorable for one display of Divine forbearance, and now it became the scene

of another. Like the hand of Abraham when ready to plunge the knife into the bosom of his son, the hand of the angel was stayed when about to fall on Jerusalem. For Abraham a ram had been provided to offer in the room of Isaac; and now David is commanded to offer a burnt-offering in acknowledgment of his guilt and of his need of expiation. Thus the Lord stayed His rough wind in the day of His east wind. In sparing Jerusalem, on the very eve of destruction, He caused His mercy to rejoice over judgment.

No one but must admire the spirit of David when the angel appeared on Mount Moriah. Owning frankly his own great sin, and especially his sin as a shepherd, he bared his own bosom to the sword, and entreated God to let the punishment fall on him and on his father's house. Why should the sheep suffer for the sin of the shepherd? The plea was more beautiful than correct. The sheep had been certainly not less guilty than the shepherd, though in a different way. We have seen how the anger of the Lord had been kindled against Israel when David was induced to go and number the people. And as both had been guilty, so both had been punished. The sheep had been punished in their own bodies, the shepherd in the tenderest feelings of his heart. It is a rare sight to find a man prepared to take on himself more than his own share of the blame. It was not so in paradise, when the man threw the blame on the woman and the woman on the serpent. We see that, with all his faults, David had another spirit from that of the vulgar world. After all, there is much of the Divine nature in this poor, blundering, sinning child of clay.

On the day when the angel appeared over Jerusalem,

Gad was sent back to David with a more auspicious message. He is required to build an altar to the Lord on the spot where the angel stood. This was the fitting counterpart to Abraham's act when, in place of Isaac, he offered the ram which Jehovah-jireh had provided for the sacrifice. The circumstances connected with the rearing of the altar and the offering of the burnt-offering were very peculiar, and seem to have borne a deep typical meaning. The place where the angel's arm was arrested was by the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite. It was there that David was commanded to rear his altar and offer his burnt-offering. When Araunah saw the king approaching, he bowed before him and respectfully asked the purpose of his visit. It was to buy the threshing-floor and build an altar, that the plague might be stayed. But if the threshing-floor was needed for that purpose, Araunah would give it freely; and offer it as a free gift he did, with royal munificence, along with the oxen for a burnt-offering and their implements also as wood for the sacrifice. David, acknowledging his goodness, would not be outdone in generosity, and insisted on making payment. The floor was bought, the altar was built, the sacrifice was offered, and the plague was stayed. As we read in Chronicles, fire from heaven attested God's acceptance of the offering. "And David said, This is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of the burnt-offering for Israel." That is to say, the threshing-floor was appointed to be the site of the temple which Solomon was to build; and the spot where David had hastily reared his altar was to be the place where, for hundreds of years, day after day, morning and evening, the blood of the burnt-offering was to flow, and the fumes of incense to ascend before God.

No doubt it was to save time in so pressing an emergency that Araunah gave for sacrifice the oxen with which he was working, and the implements connected with his labour. But in the purpose of God, a great truth lay under these symbolical arrangements. The oxen that had been labouring for man were sacrificed for man; both their life and their death were given for man, just as afterwards the Lord Jesus Christ, after living and labouring for the good of many, at last gave His life a ransom. The wood of the altar on which they suffered was, part of it at all events, borne on their own necks, "the threshing instruments and other instruments of the oxen," just as Isaac had borne the wood and as Jesus was to bear the cross on which, respectively, they were stretched. The sacrifice was a sacrifice of blood, for only blood could remove the guilt that had to be pardoned. The analogy is clear enough. Isaac had escaped; the ram suffered in his room. Jerusalem escaped now; the oxen were sacrificed in its room. Sinners of mankind were to escape; the Lamb of God was to die, the just for the unjust, to bring them to God.

There were other circumstances, however, not without significance, connected with the purchase of the temple site. The man to whom the ground had belonged, and whose oxen had been slain as the burnt-offering, was a Jebusite; and from the way in which he designated David's Lord, "the Lord *thy* God," it is not certain whether he was even a proselyte. Some think that he had formerly been king of Jerusalem, or rather of the stronghold of Zion, but that when Zion was taken he had been permitted to retire to Mount Moriah, which was separated from Zion only by a deep ravine. Josephus calls him a great friend of David's.

He could not have shown a more friendly spirit or a more princely liberality. The striking way in which the heart of this Jebusite was moved to co-operate with King David in preparing for the temple was fitted to remind David of the missionary character which the temple was to sustain. "My house shall be called an house of prayer for all nations." In the words of the sixty-eighth Psalm, "Because of thy temple at Jerusalem shall kings bring presents unto thee." As Araunah's oxen had been accepted, so the time would come when "the sons of the stranger that join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him and to love the name of the Lord, even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer; their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon Mine altar." What a wonderful thing is sanctified affliction! While its root lies in the very corruption of our nature, its fruit consists of the best blessings of Heaven. The root of David's affliction was carnal pride; but under God's sanctifying grace, it was followed by the erection of a temple associated with heavenly blessing, not to one nation only, but to all. When affliction, duly sanctified, is thus capable of bringing such blessings, it makes the fact all the more lamentable that affliction is so often unsanctified. It is vain to imagine that everything of the nature of affliction is sure to turn to good. It can turn to good on one condition only—when your heart is humbled under the rod, and in the same humble, chastened spirit as David you say, and feel as well as say, "I have sinned."

One other lesson we gather from this chapter of David's history. When he declined to accept the generous offer of Araunah, it was on the ground that

he would not serve the Lord with that which cost him nothing. The thought needs only to be put in words to commend itself to every conscience. God's service is neither a form nor a sham; it is a great reality. If we desire to show our honour for Him, it must be in a way suited to the occasion. The poorest mechanic that would offer a gift to his sovereign tries to make it the product of his best labour, the fruit of his highest skill. To pluck a weed from the roadside and present it to one's sovereign would be no better than an insult. Yet how often is God served with that which costs men nothing! Men that will lavish hundreds and thousands to gratify their own fancy,—what miserable driblets they often give to the cause of God! The smallest of coins is good enough for His treasury. And as for other forms of serving God, what a tendency there is in our time to make everything easy and pleasant,—to forget the very meaning of self-denial! It is high time that that word of David were brought forth and put before every conscience, and made to rebuke ever so many professed worshippers of God, whose rule of worship is to serve God with what does cost them nothing. The very heathen reprove you. Little though there has been to stimulate their love, their sacrifices are often most costly—far from sacrifices that have cost them nothing. Oh, let us who call ourselves Christians beware lest we be found the meanest, paltriest, shabbiest of worshippers! Let souls that have been blessed as Christians have devise liberal things. Let your question and the answer be: "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord, now in the presence of His people."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE TWO BOOKS OF SAMUEL.

HAVING now surveyed the events of the history of Israel, one by one, during the whole of that memorable period which is embraced in the books of Samuel, it will be profitable, before we close, to cast a glance over the way by which we have travelled, and endeavour to gather up the leading lessons and impressions of the whole.

Let us bear in mind all along that the great object of these books, as of the other historical books of Scripture, is peculiar: it is not to trace the history of a nation, in the ordinary sense, but to trace the course of Divine revelation, to illustrate God's manner of dealing with the nation whom He chose that He might instruct and train them in His ways, that He might train them to that righteousness which alone exalteth a people, and that He might lay a foundation for the work of Christ in future times, in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed. The history delineated is not that of the kingdom of Israel, but that of the kingdom of God.

The history falls into four divisions, like the acts of a drama. I. It opens with Eli as high-priest, when the state of the nation is far from satisfactory, and God's holy purpose regarding it appears a failure. II. With Samuel as the Lord's prophet, we see a remarkable

revival of the spirit of God's nation. III. With Saul a king, the fair promise under Samuel is darkened, and an evil spirit is again ascendant. IV. But with David, the conditions are again reversed; God's purpose regarding the people is greatly advanced, but in the later part of his reign the sky again becomes overcast, through his infirmities and the people's perversity, and the great forces of good and evil are left still contending, though not in the same proportion as before.

I. The opening scene, under the high-priesthood of Eli, is sad and painful. It is the sanctuary itself, the priestly establishment at Shiloh, that which ought to be the very centre and heart of the spiritual life of the nation, that is photographed for us; and it is a deplorable picture. The soul of religion has died out; little but the carcase is left. Formality and superstition are the chief forces at work, and a wretched business they make of it. Men still attend to religious service, for conscience and the force of habit have a wonderful tenacity; but what is the use? Religion does not even help morality. The acting priests are unblushing profligates, defiling the very precincts of God's house with abominable wickedness. And what better could you expect of the people when their very spiritual guides set them such an example? "Men abhor the offering of the Lord." No wonder! It irritates them in the last degree to have to give their wealth ostensibly for religion, but really to feed the lusts of scoundrels. People feel that instead of getting help from religious services for anything good, it strains all that is best in them to endure contact with such things. How can belief in a living God prevail when the very priests show themselves practical atheists? The very idea of a personal God is blotted out of the people's mind,

and superstition takes its place. Men come to think that certain words, or things, or places have in some way a power to do them good. The object of religion is not to please God, but to get the mysterious good out of the words, or things, or places that have it in them. When they are going to war, they do not think how they may get the living God to be on their side, but they take hold of the dead ark, believing that there is some spell in it to frighten their enemies. Israelites who believe such things are no better than their pagan neighbours. The whole purpose of God to make them an enlightened, orderly, sanctified people seems grievously frustrated.

Even good men become comparatively useless under such a system. The very high-priest is a kind of nonentity. If Eli had asserted God's claims with any vigour, Hophni and Phinehas would not have dared to live as they did. It is a mournful state of things when good men get reconciled to the evil that prevails, or content themselves with very feebly protesting against it. No doubt Eli most sincerely bewailed it. But the very atmosphere was drowsy, inviting to rest and quiet. There was no stir, no movement anywhere. Where all death lived, life died.

And yet, as in the days of Elijah, God had His faithful ones in the land. There were still men and women that believed in a living God, and in their closets prayed to their Father that seeth in secret. And God has wonderful ways of reviving His cause when it seems extinct. When all flesh had corrupted their way, there was yet one man left who was righteous and godly; and through Noah God peopled the world. When the new generation had become idolatrous, He chose one man, Abraham, and by him alone He built

up a holy Church, and a consecrated nation. And now, when all Israel seems to be hopelessly corrupt, God finds in an obscure cottage a humble woman, through whose seed it is His purpose that His Church be revived, and the nation saved. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones. Be thankful for every man and woman, however insignificant, in whose heart there is a living faith in a living God. No one can tell what use God may not make of the poorest saint. For God's power is unlimited. One man, one woman, one child, may be His instrument for arresting the decline of ages, and introducing a new era of spiritual revival and holy triumph.

II. For it was no less a change than this that was effected through Samuel, Hannah's child. From his infancy Samuel was a consecrated person. Brought up as a child to reverence the sanctuary and all its worship, he learned betimes the true meaning of it all; and the reverence that he had been taught to give to His outward service, he learned to associate with the person of the living God. And Samuel had the courage of his convictions, and told the people of their sins, and of God's claims. It was his function to revive belief in the spiritual God, and in His relation to the people of Israel; and to summon the nation to honour and serve Him. What Samuel did in this way, he did mainly through his high personal character and intense convictions. In office he was neither priest nor king, though he had much of the influence of both. No doubt he judged Israel; but that function came to him not by formal appointment, but rather as the fruit of his high character and commanding influence. The whole position of Samuel and the influence which he wielded were due not to temporal but spiritual con-

siderations. He manifestly walked with God; he was conspicuous for his fellowship with Jehovah, Israel's Lord; and his life, and his character, and his words, all combined to exalt Him whose servant he evidently was.

And that was the work to which Samuel was appointed. It was to revive the faith of an unbelieving people in the reality of God's existence in the first place, and in the second in the reality of His covenant relation to Israel. It was to rivet on their minds the truth that the supreme and only God was the God of their nation, and to get them to have regard to Him and to honour Him as such. He was to impress on them the great principle of national prosperity, to teach them that the one unfailing source of blessing was the active favour of God. It was their sin and their misery alike that they not only did not take the right means to secure God's favour, but, on the contrary, provoked Him to anger by their sins.

Now there were two things about God that Samuel was most earnest in pressing. The one was His holiness, the other His spirituality. The righteous Lord loved righteousness. No amount of ritual service could compensate the want of moral obedience. "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." If they would enjoy His favour, they must search out their sins, and humble themselves for them before this holy God. The other earnest lesson was God's spirituality. Not only was all idolatry and image-worship most obnoxious to Him, but no service was acceptable which did not come from the heart. Hence the great value of prayer. It was Samuel's privilege to show the people what prayer could do. He showed them prayer, when it arose from a humble,

penitent spirit, moving the Hand that moved the universe. He endeavoured to inspire them with heartfelt regard to God as their King, and with supreme honour for Him in all the transactions both of public and private life. That was the groove in which he tried to move the nation, for in that course alone he was persuaded that their true interest lay. To a large extent, Samuel was successful in this endeavour. His spirit was very different from the languid timidity of Eli. He spoke with a voice that evoked an echo. He raised the nation to a higher moral and spiritual platform, and brought them nearer to their heavenly King. Seldom has such proof been given of the almost unbounded moral power attainable by one man, if he but be of single eye and immovable will.

But, as we have said, Samuel was neither priest nor king; his conquests were the conquests of character alone. The people clamoured for a king, certainly from inferior motives, and Samuel yielded to their clamour. It would have been a splendid thing for the nation to have got an ideal king, a king adapted for such a kingdom, as deeply impressed as Samuel was with his obligation to honour God, and ruling over them with the same regard for the law and covenant of Israel. But such was not to be their first king. Some correction was due to them for having been impatient of God's arrangements, and so eager to have their own wishes complied with. Saul was to be as much an instrument of humiliation as a source of blessing.

III. And this brings us to the third act of the drama. Saul the son of Kish begins well, but he turns aside soon. He has ability, he has activity, he has abundant opportunity to make the necessary external arrangements for the welfare of the nation; but he has no

heart for the primary condition of blessing. At first he feels constrained to honour God; he accepts from Samuel the law of the kingdom and tries to govern accordingly. He could not well have done otherwise. He could not decently have accepted the office of king at the hands of Samuel without promising and without trying to have regard to the mode of ruling which the king-maker so earnestly pressed on him. But Saul's efforts to honour God shared the fate of all similar efforts when the force that impels to them is pressure from without, not heartiness within. Like a rower pulling against wind and tide, he soon tired. And when he tired of trying to rule as God would have him, and fell back on his own way of it, he seemed all the more wilful for the very fact that he had tried at first to repress his own will. Externally he was active and for a time successful, but internally he went from bad to worse. Under Saul, the process of training Israel to fear and honour God made no progress whatever. The whole force of the governing power was in the opposite direction. One thing is to be said in favour of Saul—he was no idolater. He did not encourage any outward departure from the worship of God. Neither Baal nor Ashtaroth, Moloch nor Chemosh, received any countenance at his hands. The Second Commandment was at least outwardly observed.

But for all that, Saul was the active, inveterate, and bitter persecutor of what we may call God's interest in the kingdom. There was no real sympathy between him and Samuel; but as Samuel did not cross his path, he left him comparatively alone. It was very different in the case of David. In Saul's relation to David we see the old antagonism—the antagonism of nature and grace, of the seed of the serpent and the seed of the

woman, of those born after the flesh and those born after the Spirit. Here is the most painful feature of Saul's administration. Knowing, as he did, that David enjoyed God's favour in a very special degree, he ought to have respected him the more. In reality he hated him the more. Jealousy is a blind and stupid passion. It mattered nothing to Saul that David was a man after God's own heart, except that it made him more fierce against him. How could a theocratic kingdom prosper when the head of it raged against God's anointed one, and strained every nerve to destroy him? The whole policy of Saul was a fatal blunder. Under him, the nation, instead of being trained to serve God better, and realise the end of their selection more faithfully, were carried in the opposite direction. And Saul lived to see into what confusion and misery he had dragged them by his wilful and godless rule. No man ever led himself into a more humiliating maze, and no man ever died in circumstances that proclaimed more clearly that his life had been both a failure and a crime.

IV. The fourth act of the drama is a great contrast to the third. It opens at Hebron, that place of venerable memories, where a young king, inheriting Abraham's faith, sets himself, heart and soul, to make the nation of Israel what God would have it to be. Trained in the school of adversity, his feet had sometimes slipped; but on the whole he had profited by his teacher; he had learned a great lesson of trust, and knowing something of the treachery of his own heart, he had committed himself to God, and his whole desire and ambition was to be God's servant. For a long time he is occupied in getting rid of enemies, and securing the tranquillity of the kingdom. When

that object is gained, he sets himself to the great business of his life. He places the symbol of God's presence and covenant in the securest spot in the kingdom, and where it is at once most central and most conspicuous. He proposes, after his wars are over, and when he has not only become a great king, but amassed great treasure, to employ this treasure in building a stately temple for God's worship, although he is not allowed to carry out that purpose. He remodels the economy of priests and Levites, making arrangements for the more orderly and effective celebration of all the service in the capital and throughout the kingdom for which they were designed. He places the whole administration of the kingdom under distinct departments, putting at the head of each the officer that is best fitted for the effective discharge of its duties. In all these arrangements, and in other arrangements more directly adapted to the end, he sought to promote throughout his kingdom the spirit that fears and honours God. And more especially did he labour for this in that most interesting field for which he was so well adapted—the writing of songs fitted for God's public service, and accompanied by the instruments of music in which he so greatly delighted. Need we say how his whole soul was thrown into this service? Need we say how wonderfully he succeeded in it, not only in the songs which he wrote personally, but in the school of like-minded men which he originated, whose songs were worthy to rank with his own? The whole collection, for well-nigh three thousand years, has been by far the best aid to devotion the Church of God has ever known, and the best means of promoting that fellowship with God of which his own life and expe

rience furnished the finest sample. No words can tell the effect of this step in guiding the nation to a due reverence for God, and stimulating them to the faithful discharge of the high ends for which they had been chosen.

Beautiful and most promising was the state of the nation at one period of his life. Unbounded prosperity had flowed into the country. Every enemy had been subdued. There was no division in the kingdom, and no one likely to cause any. The king was greatly honoured by his people, and highly popular. The arrangements which he had made, both for the civil and spiritual administration of the kingdom, were working beautifully, and producing their natural fruits. All things seemed to be advancing the great purpose of God in connection with Israel. Let this state of things but last, and surely the consummation will be reached. The promise to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob will be fulfilled, and the promised Seed will come very speedily to diffuse His blessing over all the families of the earth.

But into this fair paradise the serpent contrived to creep, and the consequence was another fall. Never did the cause of God seem so strong as it was in Israel under David, and never did it seem more secure from harm. David was an absolute king, without an opponent, without a rival; his whole soul was on the side of the good cause; his influence was paramount; whence could danger come? Alas, it could come and it did come from David himself. His sin in the matter of Uriah was fraught with the most fatal consequences. It brought down the displeasure of God; it lowered the king in the eyes of his subjects; it caused the enemy to blaspheme; it made rebellion less difficult; it made the success of rebellion possible. It threw back the

cause of God, we cannot tell for how long. Disaster followed disaster in the latter part of David's reign; and though he bequeathed to his son a splendid and a peaceful empire, the seeds of division had been sown in it; the germ of disruption was at work; and when the disruption came, in the days of David's grandson, no fewer than ten tribes broke away from their allegiance, and of the new kingdom which they founded idolatry was the established religion, and the worship of calves was set up by royal warrant from Bethel even to Dan.

It is sad indeed to dwell on the reverse which befel the cause of God in the latter part of the reign of David. But this event has been matched, over and over again, in the chequered history of religious movements. The story of Sisyphus has often been realized, rolling his stone up the hill, but finding it, near the top, slip from his hands and go thundering to the bottom. Or rather, to take a more Biblical similitude, the burden of the watchman of Dumah has time after time come true: "The morning cometh, and also the night." Strange and trying is often the order of Providence. The conflict between good and evil seems to go on for ever, and just when the good appears to be on the eve of triumph something occurs to throw it back, and restore the balance. Was it not so after the Reformation? Did not the Catholic cause, by diplomacy and cruelty in too many cases, regain much of what Luther had taken from it? And have we not from time to time had revivals of the Church at home that have speedily been followed by counteracting forces that have thrown us back to where we were? What encouragement is there to labour for truth and righteousness when, even if we are apparently successful, we are sure to be overtaken by

some counter-current that will sweep us back to our former position?

But let us not be too hasty or too summary in our inferences. When we examine carefully the history of David, we find that the evil that came in the end of his reign did not counteract all the good at the beginning. Who does not see that, after all, there was a clear balance of gain? The cause of God was stronger in Israel, its foundation firmer, its defences surer, than it had ever been before. Why, even if nothing had remained but those immortal psalms that ever led the struggling Church to her refuge and her strength, the gain would have been remarkable. And so it will be found that the Romish reaction did not swallow up all the good of the Reformation, and that the free-thinking reaction of our day has not neutralized the evangelical revival of the nineteenth century. A decided gain remains, and for that gain let us ever be thankful.

And if the gain be less decided and less full than once it promised, and if Amalek gains upon Israel, and recovers part of the ground he had lost, let us mark well the lesson which God designs to teach us. In the first place, let us learn the lesson of vigilance. Let us watch against the decline of spiritual strength, and against the decline of that fellowship with God from which all spiritual strength is derived. Let those who are prominent in the Church watch their personal conduct let them be intensely careful against those inconsistencies and indulgences by which, when they take place, such irreparable injury is done to the cause. And in the second place, let us learn the lesson of patient waiting and patient working. As the early Church had to wait for the promise of the Father, so

let the Church wait in every age. As the early Church continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, so let each successive age ply with renewed earnestness its applications to the throne of grace. And let us be encouraged by the assurance that long though the tide has ebbed and flowed, and flowed and ebbed, it will not be so for ever. To them that look for Him, the great Captain shall appear the second time without sin unto salvation. "The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord. As for Me, this is My covenant with them, saith the Lord; My spirit that is upon thee, and My words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever" (Isa. lix. 20, 21).

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